

Green

50p / \$1.50

The Journal of the Society for
Education in Film and Television
Summer 1971

03JUY95

1--0008

8211-7548

Screen

Theatre and Cinema

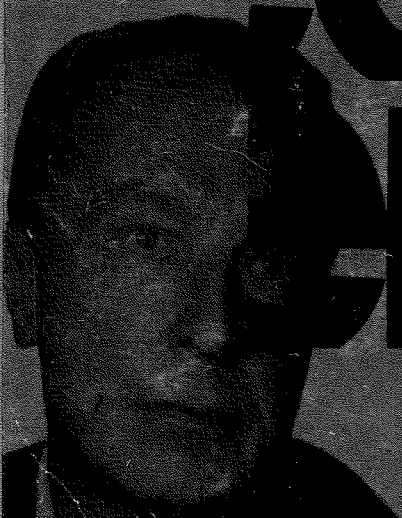
German Expressionism

German Expressionism

The American Film

Articles by Godard / Elsaesser / Halliday

Special Number: Douglas Sirk



Film Loops for the Nuffield Science Teaching Project published by Penguin Education

Nuffield Advanced Science

Standard 8 only

Chemistry

The hydrolysis of bromoalkanes £6.30

Rate of reaction £6.30

The Born - Haber cycle £6.30

The manufacture of plastic articles £6.30

Problems in the use of detergents £6.30

Applications of paper chromatography £6.30

Two-way paper chromatography £6.30

Applications of the mass spectrometer £6.30

Publication in June

Organic analysis by the mass spectrometer £6.30

Publication in August

Testing of plastic film £6.30

Addition to carbon - carbon double bonds £6.30

Biology

Frog sciatic nerve £6.00

Locust ventral nerve cord £5.50

Handling radioisotopes I:

Carbon-14 £5.50

Handling radioisotopes II:

Phosphorus-32 £5.50

The use of the microscope £5.50

Physics

X-ray diffraction

1 Production of the X-ray beam £6.30

2 Diffraction of monochromatic X-rays by a single crystal £6.30

3 Diffraction of monochromatic X-rays by a powder specimen £6.30

4 Determination of the wavelength using a diffraction grating £6.30
Change and chance: (16mm film mute) £21.00

A model of thermal equilibrium in a solid

In preparation

Solving a standing wave equation for a hydrogen atom £4.25

Forwards or backwards? I £5.50

Forwards or backwards? II £5.50

Forwards or backwards? III £5.50

Nuffield Combined Science

(Published jointly with Longman)

African clawed toad - injection and pairing Std £5.25 Super £6.25

Male rat - finding the reproductive system Std £5.25 Super £6.25

Female rat - finding the reproductive system Std £5.25 Super £6.25

A variety of animals and movements - I Std £5.25 Super £6.25

A variety of animals and movements - II Std £5.25 Super £6.25

Detergency Std £5.25 Super £6.25

Birth - calf and lamb

Std £3.75 Super £4.50

Growth of a bean shoot

Std £5.25 Super £6.25

Contact electricity in a circuit

Std £5.25 Super £6.25

Please order through your normal bookshops and contractors.

For further information write to:

Penguin Education,
Harmondsworth, Middlesex

The Haunted Screen
by Lotte H. Eisner

Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of
Max Reinhardt

Illustrated £4.20

Four Screenplays
by Carl Theodor Dreyer

Illustrated £4.25

The Making and Unmaking of
'Que Viva Mexico!'

by Sergei Eisenstein & Upton Sinclair

Edited by Harry M. Geduld and Ronald Gottesman

Illustrated £6.30



THE

GREATS

OF INTERNATIONAL CINEMA

GODARD
EISENSTEIN

WAJDA

FORMAN

SKOLIMOWSKI

OZU

RAY

RENOIR

BUNUEL

JANCSO

PUDOVKIN

FELLINI

RESNAIS

DE SICA

BOROWCYZK

ALL IN OUR CATALOGUES

SEND FOR CATALOGUE (38p + 10p post)

CONTEMPORARY FILMS LTD, 55 Greek Street, W1V 6DB

01-734 4901 (6 lines)

Editorial

The Work of Screen is to develop a politics of education and of film. The two are not separate in a journal of film education.

Educational experiments such as the Humanities Curriculum Project tend to choose films whose aesthetic is realist and naturalist — close reflections, depictions of the world. The aesthetic choice of the Project is dictated by a prior educational choice. Educational policy and strategy contain as coherent a view of the world as any aesthetic does and the two are often placed together as mutual supports in the practice of film education.

Like the Project *Screen* will be forced to take a definite position on film in the process of taking a position on education. *Screen* however will make its aesthetic choice clear and explicit.

The immediate question for *Screen* in this special number is why Douglas Sirk? And why more particularly a special number and special kind of presentation? Does an educational rationale dictate the director, the films and the context in which these are placed?

The articles specific to Sirk and his films in this issue of *Screen* all demonstrate the formal and stylistic complexity of his work and most important that the 'meaning' and significance of his films are not overt or explicit but must be gathered precisely by means of an analysis of formal procedures. Sirk is anything but a realist. Objects, relations are seen as 'through a glass darkly' and the mirrors in his films mirror ambiguities of perception, impossibilities of seeing, of relating and are not simple reflections and depictions of the 'real' world.

A study of Sirk would 'scandalise' the usual theme-orientated approach to film studies. Sirk in the classroom would raise aesthetic formal issues concerned with theatricality, cliché, structure, play, metaphor as issues

primary to any understanding of his films and prior to any 'theme' discussion about the family, relations between the sexes, war. In short, a study of Sirk would subvert usual procedures of talking about film in the classroom and more particularly a procedure which regards film as reflection of life and uses it instrumentally 'for other things' rather than for what it is.

For that point alone a study of Sirk by *Screen* seems justified but there is a further rationale connected with a politics of education.

If Sirk cannot be easily accommodated educationally, the question is why not? And why in fact is film most used under broad based humanities-type curricula taking film away from itself and dragging it towards topics external to it or towards disciplines academically most respectable like history and sociology which are non-specific to the medium of film? The technical answers concerned with general changes in curricula particularly in English teaching or the growth of inter-disciplinary work are not explanations at all but part of the problem and need explaining.

A sociology, history, even psychology of film are certainly valid important approaches. Indeed an approach to film through the humanities might be extremely fruitful in schools and elsewhere but prior to studies of this sort is an aesthetics of film, film theory, an understanding of the object film as a pre-condition for its sociological or other kinds of analysis. As Terry Lovell stated in *Screen* Spring 1971 — '. . . the dependence of sociology on film theory . . . is evident. For the task of developing tools and methods of interpretation and analysis of films belongs in the first instance to film theory.'

The choice of Sirk as an object of *Screen's* attention can only raise these sorts of educational and critical questions. Specifically, however, these questions must be answered by particular studies of educational projects, the use of film in 'Liberal' studies, in art education. Such studies will in future constitute a major area of work in *Screen*.

The films of Sirk and his aesthetic ideas are placed in this issue within an historical, cultural and aesthetic framework. It is not the usual *auteur* study out of place, out of time, for it seeks to give Sirk's work significance within a context and raises general aesthetic issues about theatre and film, political ones concerned with formal means and ideology while at the same time keeping to the films in their specificity.

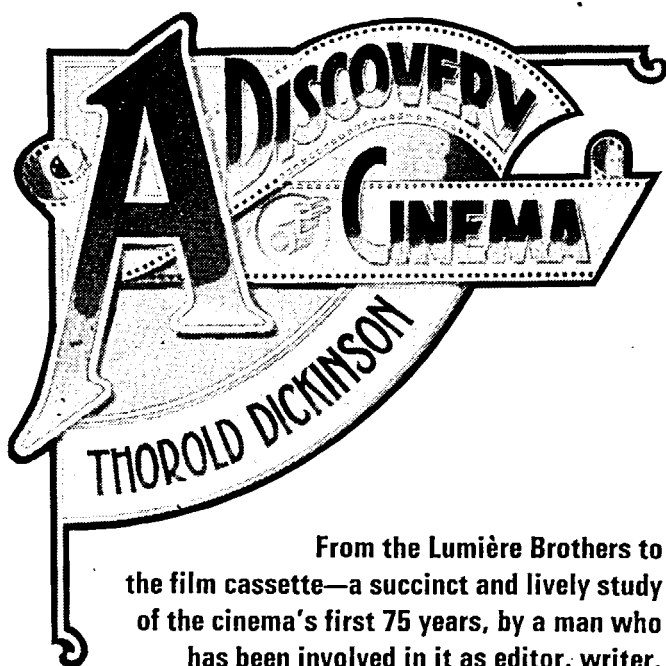
The principle succeeds rather better than the practice. Not only do historical, informational gaps exist in the presentation, but there is both overlap and methodological confusion.

The confusion in method is not strictly an editorial error. This issue on Sirk made evident to *Screen* the close relation between an educational

and film politics and the need for *Screen* to have a politics of both aspects combined in a distinct view for film education. But the Sirk issue suggests the need for even greater coherence of a sort not originally thought of or bargained for — the development of a methodology of some rigour setting out not only the problems that need to be confronted but the manner of their confrontation.

Screen is not a 'forum of ideas', a format for extreme Liberalism giving space to all opinions. And yet, in a sense, this is precisely what the Sirk issue methodologically is and that reflects not so much policy as expediency, the difficulty in Britain of trying to establish a film and critical culture (the presumption involved in the attempt) and the lack of ideological, intellectual or critical agreement even among a small group of film critics and film educationists.

S.R.



**From the Lumière Brothers to
the film cassette—a succinct and lively study
of the cinema's first 75 years, by a man who
has been involved in it as editor, writer,
director, and producer since 1925.**

£3

paper covers £1.50

Oxford University Press

Notes on Sirk's German Films

Jon Halliday

Author's Note: Since I have seen only four of Sirk's German works — Das Mädchen vom Moorhof (1935), Stützen der Gesellschaft (1935), Zu Neuen Ufern (1937), and La Habanera (1937) — I shall confine myself largely to these. This limited viewing necessarily restricts the scope of the article.¹

Douglas Sirk (Detlef Sierck) entered the cinema in 1934, at the age of thirty-four, largely on the strength of a production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. He was at this stage a well-known and successful young theatre director, currently heading the Leipzig municipal theatre. On the strength of his carefully crafted *Twelfth Night*, Sirk was hired by Ufa, in spite of a left-wing reputation, and scandal-stricken tenure of office at Leipzig.

It would be extremely interesting, if more material were available, to study in more detail the transition from theatre to cinema effected by several German (and Austrian) directors, most notably Max Ophüls (entered cinema 1930) and Detlef Sierck. Ophüls, for example, known by cinema critics as a great 'stylist', in fact had quite a tough, revolutionary theatre career, including the staging of works like Friedrich Wolf's *Die Matrosen von Cattaro* (*The Sailors of Kotor*), about a famous mutiny in the Austro-Hungarian navy during the First World War (staged Wrocław, 1930). But this, vital, aspect of his career is rarely mentioned.

Similarly for Sirk, who was one of the most imaginative and inventive young left-wing directors in Germany. But here the transition to the cinema has been made doubly problematic by the fact that the shift took place after Hitler's advent to power. The prevailing standpoint in the West has been to write off everything made in Germany after January 1933; this position is challenged by Hull in his recent book in salutary manner. The same critical *methods* which have been (generously) applied to Italy (to Rossellini in particular) and to Japan (to Mizoguchi, for example) must also be applied to Germany.

The evidence is that in spite of the overall atrocious climate of repression and philistinism in Germany after 1933, there was *de facto* a certain amount of freedom for manoeuvre in the cinema — and in Ufa in particular. The owner of the studio, Hugenberg, was a legendary backer of

the far right; but the production manager, Correll, seems to have maintained a *relatively* liberal working regime. At any rate, Sirk insists on the comparative freedom in the cinema, at least in the beginning.²

It was for this very reason that he decided to break out of the theatre into motion pictures, in 1934. After three shorts of about half an hour each, he was handed his first feature in early 1935: a semi-musical, which he shot first in a Dutch-language version (*'T was een April*) and subsequently in a German-language version (*April April*): for the latter he was given a well-known actor of the time, Albrecht Schoenhals (recently to be seen in Visconti's *The Damned*). The reviews in the trade papers (both versions having now been lost) indicate the director managed to do a surprising amount of transformation on basically recalcitrant material.³

His second feature, *Das Mädchen vom Moorhof*, was also handed to him by the studio. The script is based rather closely on the novel of the same name by Selma Lagerlöf, *The Girl from the Marshcroft*, which had already been made into a successful silent by Victor Sjöström. Sirk's version, while showing some uncertainties, also reveals several of his predilections: many mirror shots and reflections in water; the deliberate dismantling of 'suspense' (where he does radically alter the structure of the Lagerlöf original); considerable use of the local church, and the relationship to it of the local burghers; the exposure of pretence and hypocrisy. Sirk here, too, for the first time makes a major excursus into what seems to have been favourite terrain: the waterfront, fishing nets, mist and fog, sleazy bars, and lighting reminiscent of Sternberg (these recur in *Stützen der Gesellschaft* and *Zu Neuen Ufern*). In *Mädchen* one can also see (for the first time?) Sirk's elevation of objects to the 'status' of persons: the farm implements hanging on the barns are endowed with the properties of living beings: scythes and knives (which play a crucial part in the structure of the film) are given threatening qualities (cf the altar in *First Legion*).

By now, after less than a year at Ufa, Sirk was an acknowledged success, and for his next feature, an adaptation of Ibsen's *Pillars of Society* (*Stützen der Gesellschaft*), Sirk was given the then leading stage actor in Germany, Heinrich George. Sirk had in fact once directed the play on the stage, at Sopot in 1923, with Albert Basserman in the lead — this being the only instance of him filming and staging the same play. In the filmed version, Sirk has eliminated several of the Ibsen characters, including the clergyman, and pared the story down to its bare skeleton. Again, Sirk has re-organised the structure of the original to remove the 'suspense': Bernick (H. George) is exposed very early in the film, and there is a noticeable shift in the level at which Sirk re-locates the social criticism inherent in the story.

At the same time, he has greatly expanded the American element, and the film opens with an extended sequence set in the 'Wild' West, where Sirk revels not only in Americana (cowboys, horses, ranches, etc), but also in the paraphernalia of exotic heat (mosquito nets), which he was later to intensify in both *Zu Neuen Ufern* and in *La Habanera*. The return from the American West to Europe (Norway) allows for a stunning demonstration of Sirk's gift of transition: as Schoenhals (Tönnessen) raises his glass to the Norwegian flag in his hut in the West, it falls away to reveal a statue of Bernick which is being unveiled under the hostile stares of the local proletariat back in Norway. Moreover, the return allows Sirk to introduce one of the cross-cultural figures he clearly finds of interest: in *Stützen* Schoenhals wears a combination of American and European gear, just as Taza (R. Hudson) wears a cross between American police uniform and Indian clothes in *Taza, Son of Cochise* twenty years later. In fact, it would be possible to see the whole film as a cultural parable: the influx of energy and honesty from the West into a stultified, dishonest small town in Europe. Schoenhals charges through at the head of his circus, detonating paroxysms of pretence, terror and deceit (rather comparable to the return of Barbara Stanwyck in *All I Desire*), while Bernick merely plays at being a 'Westerner', appearing by surprise in the family mansion — in true Sirkian manner, first seen through frosted glass — dressed as an Indian, with a tomahawk, with which he assaults his wife; while his son, Olaf, likewise merely reads about cowboys (Texas Jack) and Indians in bed. Yet, along with this cross-cultural thematic, Sirk significantly strengthens the class element in the story: Bernick and his family are shown as totally isolated from, and loathed by the local fishermen and workers.

To resume: in *Stützen* one can see Sirk already adumbrating many of his favourite themes: the relationship between America and Europe (later taken up in, for example, *Interlude*); the detonation of pretence, associated with class (cf *All I Desire*, *Imitation of Life*, *All That Heaven Allows*, etc); as in *Mädchen*, there is here a long scene in a waterfront bar, with fishing nets and gauzy lighting; much use of water, and a spectacular storm (cf *Summer Storm*, *Thunder on the Hill*, *Interlude*, etc). The camera work and lighting, perhaps because of better facilities, and a new cameraman (Drews), but presumably mainly due to Sirk's greater control over the medium, shows a marked leap forward from that in *Mädchen*.

From *Stützen*, Sirk (who was still working in the theatre at the same time) moved on to his first full-scale melodrama, *Schlussakkord*, the story of the unhappy marriage between a successful conductor (played by Willy Birgel) and his wife (Lil Dagover). They have adopted a son, whose real mother returns to Germany to work as nurse to the boy.

Dagover dies, having fallen into the hands of a clairvoyant, and the real mother (Maria von Tasnady) and Birgel fall in love.

According to Sirk, *Schlussakkord* marks a definite signpost in his career: his decision to accept an atrociously mawkish story, loaded down with 'melodrama', and turn it into something new: 'I got the smell of a tremendous success,' he recalls; the official scriptwriter was so appalled at Sirk's transformation that he insisted on removing his name from the credits. The film went on to be a huge hit, both in Germany and abroad — in Switzerland, America and elsewhere.

Das Hofkonzert, which he made the same year, was a period musical, which seems to have been completely lost. Sirk here had the collaboration of an excellent composer, Edmund Nick, who did the music. And for the first time, he worked with Franz Weihmayr as cameraman, who was to do all of Sirk's remaining films in Germany and who was able to work as harmoniously with Sirk as Russell Metty was later on to do in America.

In the winter of 1936-37 Sirk was assigned the task of turning a new Ufa discovery, the Swedish actress Zarah Leander, into a star. He cast her in a period melodrama, set largely in Australia in the nineteenth century: *Zu Neuen Ufern* (*To New Shores*). Opposite her he cast again Willy Birgel, who had played the conductor in *Schlussakkord*, here in *Ufern* as a decadent, weak British officer who runs away to Australia to avoid his debts, incapable of taking responsibility for his own actions. Stylistically, *Ufern* is one of the most extraordinary films ever made: the main tradition to which it belongs is clearly that of Brecht and Weill — not just in the combination of music, songs and dialogue, but in the assemblage of contrasts, of light, of class, of geography. One scene in particular, the trial of Gloria Vane (Zarah Leander) represents a highly successful attempt to put the Weill-Brecht advances on to the screen. The scene is introduced with an old woman singing a song about Paramatta (the women's prison in Australia to which Leander is about to be consigned by a class-prejudiced court) outside the courtroom; she has a large placard with a number of pictures of Paramatta on it: the camera passes from her into the courtroom, where Leander is sentenced, back out to the woman in the street and then *through* a picture of Paramatta to Paramatta itself, baking in the bright Australian sun, as the camera moves straight to the prison church, whence issue the voices of the prisoners singing hymns. Cut to the governor's mansion where Birgel is languidly pursuing the governor's daughter.

Both *Ufern* and *La Habanera* are melodramas in the second sense of melodrama: dramas with music: songs, as well as music without words, are integral to the structure of the films. Both are also quite uncompromisingly tough critical films — the one directed against the British

ruling class and colonialism (cf *Captain Lightfoot*), the other against big business in the colonies (*La Habanera* is set in Puerto Rico). At the same time, both films are shot in a style which is usually associated with the 'exotic': the nearest comparison again being Sternberg, although several sequences, particularly a long cab ride in the fog in *Ufern* unequivocally recall Ophüls. Both films show Sirk as much master of the traditions and genres of the German cinema as he was to demonstrate twenty years later with *Written on the Wind* and *Imitation of Life* in America. The surprise of the films (quite apart from their excellence) is both political — to see what could still be made in Germany in 1937 — and 'stylistic'. The pre-1933 traditions are preserved, even enlivened, but within a highly unlikely format — one which the critics, inevitably, have largely failed to appreciate. Who was ready then — or now — to give attention to a (fused) combination of the traditions of Weill, Ophüls, Brecht and Sternberg, melted down and transformed by Sirk, five years after Hitler had come to power? Yet, on a viewing in 1970, these films stand up extremely well — certainly as *German* films, the kind which might have been made in 1937 if there had been no 1933 . . . except, of course, they were made in 1937.

It is possible to see many parallels between Sirk's later German films and his later American works: the ends of *La Habanera* and of *Imitation of Life* are very similar. *La Habanera* is centred on the symbiosis of social disease (capitalism) and actual disease (a plague hitting the island, news of which is suppressed by the fruit company to ensure its own exports at the cost of the local inhabitants' lives). The hospital, which recurs again and again in Sirk's work (*Thunder on the Hill*, *Magnificent Obsession*, etc) first appears as a major institution here in *La Habanera* — as in *Thunder*, a convent and hospital. The doctor, too, makes a prominent appearance — in Puerto Rico.

For a full understanding of Sirk's German work, one would have to consider in detail both his stage work at the same time, and the films he wanted to make, but was not allowed to: these included two projects he did later manage to shoot in America — films based on Chekhov's *The Shooting Party* (*Summer Storm*, 1943-44) and Faulkner's *Pylons* (*The Tarnished Angels*), 1957. Both of these are about social disintegration: the one set in pre-1917 Russia, the other in the American South during the Depression. Sirk also wanted to make a film based on the Children's Crusade — but could not get backing for this in either Germany or America. The main project he was working on at the time he managed to get out of Germany was *Dreiklang*, a composite of Turgenev's *First Love* and Pushkin's *The Shot*; Sirk completed a script on this, and prepared the whole film, then shot after his departure by Hans Hinrich. Another pair of films also deserves consideration: *Hitler's Madman* (1942-43) and *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (1958) — Sirk's two

American films which deal with Nazi Germany. The reflection in the two films differs substantially, according to time. *Madman* is a white-hot anti-Nazi film (the madman of the title being Heydrich). *Time* is a more leisurely, much sadder, deeper, elliptic-incisive portrayal of life under the Nazis. Where *Madman* is about the Nazis and the political opposition at the time in Czechoslovakia (which, interestingly, 'includes the German wife of the imported German mayor — is Sirk more optimistic than Lang?), *Time* is only reluctantly about the Nazis themselves: rather it is about the *Germans* under the Nazis. Its effect is well registered by Jean-Luc Godard: 'I have never believed so much in Germany at war as seeing this picture made in America in peacetime.'⁴

It would be possible to argue that Sirk reached a peak of *accomplishment* with his later German films: certainly *Zu Neuen Ufern* and *La Habanera* show the same complete mastery of style and matter as do *Written on the Wind*, *Tarnished Angels* and *Imitation of Life*. In spite of the *politics* of the times, Sirk has managed to build out of the cultural traditions of pre-Hitlerian Germany; the 'melo-drama' of *Ufern* and *La Habanera* emerges from a milieu which had no parallel in America. Sirk's German films are a unique illumination: a sign of what the German cinema could have been after 1933 — and which it actually was in this one case. But, in the *Cahiers'* words, it was 'an impossible cinema'. In 1937 Sirk managed to flee from Germany at the peak of his career. Like Lang and Siodmak, he attempted a return to Germany after the war. But the German cinema had by then been wrecked, and the traditions apparently irretrievably smashed. Even Sirk, the master of hopelessness, could not build on ruins.

FOOTNOTES

1. The full list of features is as follows:

- 1935: 'T was één April (*It was In April*) — Dutch version of *April, April*
Das Mädchen vom Moorhof (*The Girl From the Marshcroft*)
Stützen der Gesellschaft (*Pillars of Society*)
- 1936: *Schlussakkord* (trans — both 'Final Accord' and 'Last Chord'; released in USA as *Ninth Symphony*, also known as *Final Accord*).
Das Hofkonzert (*Court Concert*); also shot in French as *La Chanson du Souvenir* (*Song of Remembrance*)
- 1937: *Zu Neuen Ufern* (literally 'To New Shores'; credit reads *Life Begins Anew*, though also referred to sometimes as *To New Shores*)
La Habanera

Co-scripted: *Liebling der Matrosen* (*Sailors' Darling*, Hans Hinrich, 1937); *Dreiklang* (*Triol*, H. Hinrich, 1938).

- 2. See the review in this issue of Hull's book by Clive Coultass. It seems clear from evidence presented here by Jon Halliday on Sirk and from Hull's discussion of directors like Selpin that the category 'Nazi' film is only a special category of German film after 1933 and that the period of the thirties cannot simply be written off artistically as Coultass implies it must be (S.R.).
- 3. See, for example, *Der Film*, October 26, 1935.
- 4. Godard, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, April 1959.

"The British film industry is fortunate indeed to have such an industrious and reliable historian." -

Paul Rotha

RACHAEL LOW'S

long-awaited

The History of the British Film

1918-1929

Dr Low continues the definitive history she started over twenty years ago. She examines the economic, social and artistic changes in the British film industry of the twenties, and carefully studies the interaction of economic and artistic success: the struggle of individual creativity with the complexities of technology and finance.

She traces the changing attitudes towards the cinema and the first aesthetic theories concerning the nature of the film.

There is an authoritative index of over 850 British films of the period, including their main production details, and a full general index.

Arthur Calder-Marshall described the first volume of this history as 'an essential work for the film student'. Ernest Lindgren said it was 'indispensable', and *Kinematograph Weekly* described it as a 'must for all serious film people'.

480 pages 24 pages illustrations £7.35

George Allen & Unwin

UNITED FILM SERVICES

- Hundreds of 16 mm
SOUND/SILENT
EDUCATIONAL TITLES
- Over 100 NEW/SECOND
HAND 16 mm SOUND
PROJECTORS sold each
year
- AUDIO/VISUAL AIDS
SPECIALISTS

FREE lists and information
from

13 KING STREET
LEICESTER LE1 6RN

Telephone: 20708

new

left

review

the most famous marxist journal in the english language: contains politics, philosophy, reportage, interviews (most recently with Jean-Paul Sartre) culture (Peter Wollen and Lee Russell on films)

subscriptions £1.85 per annum
or £1.75 by banker's order

nlr

7 Carlisle Street,
London W1

Tel: 01-734 8839

Documents on Sirk

With a postscript by Thomas Elsaesser

I *Encounter with Genius*, Detlef Sierck

Being a wanderer between many poetic worlds, a theatre producer occasionally encounters the world of genius. And such an occasion is the great compensation for his restless mission, which forever condemns him to circle an alien identity, for it means that he, too, can commune with greatness. Although a poetic work of minor stature gives the interpreter an opportunity to express his personality in a way which reveals more decisively and energetically his own part in the second creation, the encounter with genius is nonetheless the one adventure not to be forgotten.

I shall never forget, above all else, those intoxicating weeks, when I was allowed to put on Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra, even if in the event it became only a sketch, a bare outline of what I actually felt. This world of political gamblers, puffed-up Caesars, soldiers, sailors, gypsies — and the incomparable woman herself! Each of them driven by their lust for power, their sensuality, their political fever — a world of terrifyingly palpable flesh, which finally spiritualises itself in the death of the couple, most voluptuous of them all.

A world! — Never in a play have I felt so strongly, beside the spiritual plane, the existence of the geographical sphere. One senses the globe, the earth, and one looks from Europe to Asia, and further into the depths of Africa, until in the end the pyramids receive this world of passion and power. However, I do not want to talk of Shakespeare here, about whom I could never say enough, but about another genius, whom I had the good fortune to encounter very early, and again most recently in my career.

I hated Friedrich Schiller — and I loved him. The realism of my youth rebelled against his idealistic world, with its magic fires, and its characters motivated not psychologically, but by metaphysics. As a seventeen-year-old grammar schoolboy I staged Kabale und Liebe (Intrigue and Love) among friends, but not without first subjecting Schiller's prose to some extensive reworking, which in our opinion would replace his

pedantic style by a little more life-likeness and updated relevance. A wall-paper covered with gilded baroque ornaments in a large 'salon' was the background to our efforts to improve Schiller, an attempt which met with only partial approval by the guests at my parents' house. Nevertheless, a first contact, a recreative acquaintance was made with this genius, whose charm was not lost on me. Despite the youthfully ironic arrogance in the face of Schiller's hateful polarity, the overbearing schoolboy was overwhelmed, and before he knew what had happened, he was baptised by his fire.

When I came to put on Die Räuber for the first time, I succumbed to Schiller with such a frightening immediacy that the pull between the creative vision of the producer, and the excited abandon to the poet's word and image was never wholly reconciled. The spiritual and political energy of this playwright, the mystic-cool flame burning in his heart all of a sudden overwhelmed too abruptly and too deeply the aversion I still believed was in me. I, living in the present completely surrendered to the greatness of the past. As a result, something very beautiful, but also very distant, came into Schiller's sombre, musical dissonances, his romantic baroque, the giant dimensions of his diction. During this time, I learnt most decisively that the recreating artist must touch his model only as material upon which to work, and that the essential thing is not only to feel one's way into the spirit of a work of the past, but rather to embrace it with one's own personality, and to give it a new place in the heart of the present. The important point is not to be dead with the dead, but to set their imperishable life and their immortal spirit free from the husk of the past, and to bring them to life once more among living human beings. Only this is fidelity towards the work, respect towards the creative personality — something that in turn only a personality can accomplish.

I have later experienced this liberating fulfilment of one's own artistic self during my work on Maria Stuart, where I was able to flesh out the idealist political atmosphere of the play with a clear-cut, translucent realism, and succeeded in making these lords and lovers who surround two great political women appear as truly human and actual, beneath the arch of Schiller's ideas. And finally, I have experienced it now, in weeks of deeply gratifying work on Don Carlos.

(from the *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, November 30, 1929. Translated by Thomas Elsaesser.)

II Detlef Sierck: *An Obituary*, Gerhard Hellmers (in: *Bremer Nachrichten*, 11th January 1930)

This obituary is dedicated not to one who is dead or has passed away, but to someone who is particularly alive, possessed as he is by the life and the art of the stage. Detlef Sierck, until recently chief producer at the Bremen Schauspielhaus, has left Bremen in order to take over the municipal theatre at Leipzig as its absolute dictator (art being always autocratic). Not so long ago we wrote about his first important new production at Leipzig, Schiller's Don Carlos. Already the choice of this play, replete with historical, passionately humanitarian and revolutionary political ideas, particularly difficult because presenting the audience with two successive heroes, shows the undaunted, self-confident determination of the producer. Sierck overcame the historical distance of the material by steeping it, in his customary way, deeply in our present times, once again driven forward by the impetuous breath and rhythm of life in ferment. He toned down the ambiguity of the action, which changes its hero in mid-course, by placing the spokesman of enlightened liberalism, the Marquis of Posa at the centre of events right from the beginning, thus letting the revolutionary ethic emerge in a powerful dramatic final chord out of the artistic and technical unity of the production. With this play, Sierck gave evidence to the Leipzig public of the same high standards as a producer which we had so often the occasion to observe in Bremen.

The intellectual basis of his talent is above all to be found in Sierck's creative imagination, which guides him blindfold and yet securely through the labyrinth of intention and sentiment even in a work of art outside our tradition, straight to the central nerve of the artist's intention. With this recreative imagination, he can integrate unfamiliar worlds of feeling, as well as historical distance into our present experience. At the same time, and this is Sierck's greatest accomplishment, he is able to situate a modern play in the wider perspective of more permanent aesthetic values. He is familiar with the dramatic tradition, possesses a sense of responsibility, not derived from laborious study, but from an inborn feeling for form and artistic tact. In his memorable production of Schiller's Die Räuber (The Robbers) the fire of our own revolutionary youth was burning brightly, and by contrast, in Arnolt Bronnen's raucous and brawling Rheinische Rebellen (Rhineland Rebels), through all the excessive and confused noise, one could still sense the breath of Schiller's revolutionary yearning. Such artistic far-sightedness makes one conscious of the universality of Sierck's talent which protects him from the fanatical one-sidedness of someone like Erwin Piscator, who mercilessly compresses every historical past into the procrustian bed of his political-communist utopia, and for whom present-day drama only exists as political propaganda.

This superiority Sierck owes to his firm grasp of a thoroughly universal and humanist education, acquired at grammar school and university. There his imagination, by nature inclined to dissipate itself, was tamed and directed towards shaping itself into the form and substance of reality. This is amply proven by his productions of modern plays. One recalls the razor-sharp precision of his dramatic sense in Georg Kaiser's soul-operation called Oktobertag (The Phantom Lover), or the clear French dialectic in Jules Romain's Dictator, and then again, the dramatic strands, always kept visible amidst the twilight of a colourful mysticism in Strindberg's Dreamplay, or the instinctual, and yet shiningly protestant St Joan by Shaw, to name only a few. Sierck's apogee in Bremen was his artistic collaboration with the exceptionally gifted, actress of dramatically demanding parts, Doramarie Herwelly. What might have seemed over-exuberant in Sierck's creative urge vibrant with full-blooded passion, was moderated and tempered by this actress and her clear spiritual air into exactly the right degree of transparency and fluidity. I am thinking in particular of her parts in Hebbel's plays — Mariamne, Judith and Rhodope; furthermore, there were the Shakespearean comedy roles, Kleist's Penthesilea, Goethe's Iphigenie and Sophocles' Antigone.

The strongest, though in my opinion not altogether most successful sign of Sierck's determination to transpose classical plays into our modern, hysterical present, was his production of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. By means of a modern, psychoanalytical interpretation, the old tragedy of fate became the tragedy of a monomaniac blinded by his sexual urges, who succumbs to his Freudian complexes. Here the obsession of the producer with his own times and modern life in general loosened the mystic-mythical basis of the original, and as it did in Hofmannsthal's Elektra-version, ended by fragmenting the monumental form. Yet this was to remain the only case in which the historical roots of a work suffered from Sierck's commitment to the present. This commitment manifested itself most successfully in the witty and sparkling dialogue of modern plays, and in the entertainment pieces of today, which are of course important for any financially viable theatre. To demonstrate the versatility of his dramatic work, one need only draw attention to his interpretations of playwrights like Grabbe (Napoleon, oder Die Hundert Tage — Napoleon, or The Hundred Days), Kleist (Hermannsschlacht — The Battle of Arminius), Ibsen (John Gabriel Borkman), Shaw, W. Goetz and Angermaier. And to complete the picture, one might mention the short-lived entertainment provided by plays like those of Edgar Wallace, Maugham, Molnar, etc., in which Sierck was supported by the overflowing talent of a born actress like Hilde Jary.

This, then, in a few lines, sketches the six years of creative work at the Schauspiels Haus of a distinguished German theatre producer and director.

Undoubtedly Bremen theatrical life has suffered a great loss. But it is also true that no one is irreplaceable, and that only a rolling stone gathers no moss. On the stage, an occasional blood-transfusion is particularly necessary. Sierck, too, must and will be replaced. His own development will predictably lead him far. That he may continue to serve German art, threatened as it is by internationalism, is surely his own wish as much as it is ours.

(from *Bremer Nachrichten* January 11, 1930. Translated by Thomas Elsaesser.)

III Letter from Sierck to the Bavarian radio, June 20, 1969.

'Briefly, as far as my memory still holds about this time, which I have always tried hard to forget:

*Immediately after Hitler's seizure of power, a bitter struggle broke out in my theatre in Leipzig about the artistic autonomy of the theatre in general. In spite of many warnings, both from the Nazis and from the municipal council, I was determined not to scrap the opening performance of the *Die Silbersee* (The Silver Lake) by Georg Kaiser, with music by Kurt Weill, which I had planned for a long time, and which was about to go into rehearsal. Even today one can imagine in what an increasingly nervous atmosphere the rehearsals took place. More than half the members of my ensemble were running round with the swastika in their button-hole — and this just from one day to the next.*

But the real, essential content of the play continued to appeal to the actors, who still remained loyal to me. And so the day of the première came nearer. An enormous contingent of reporters, both from Berlin and from abroad turned up. Kaiser and Weill, who had been present at the last rehearsal, could not hide their nervousness. And Weill, so far as I can remember, was already preoccupied with leaving Germany very soon. Even at the dress rehearsal, the Nazi — but comparatively well-disposed — town-councillor, Hauptmann asked me to put off the opening. Something terrible would happen, he assured me, which he was not in a position to prevent. After consultation with Kaiser, Weill and the set designer Casper Neber, we decided to take on 'the terrible', especially as we were convinced of the political importance of the play, and of the artistic quality of the production, the music and the sets. Right on the day of the opening, the mayor of Leipzig, Dr Carl-Friedrich Goerdeler, rang me and advised me to pretend to fall ill and postpone the first night for a couple of weeks. Then everything could be let drop without

much stir. I explained to him that I held the freedom of intellectual and artistic life in Germany to be too important and in this particular moment too threatened to postpone a first night of Kaiser and Weill. Then Dr Goerdeler told me that he had reliable information that the SA and the [Nazi] Party groups intended to block the opening. I replied that only two people could stop the opening — he himself as the mayor of Leipzig, and I, as the sole responsible artistic director of the town theatre. 'I will not ban the performance,' Dr Goerdeler said. He neither knew the piece, nor had he seen the rehearsals. But he let it be understood that my position as director of the theatre was being laid on the line, and that in the case of a political scandal, he, the mayor, would perhaps be unable to do anything for me.

The performance, I then told him, would take place. When this call was made, we were about ten hours away from the greatest political scandal there had ever been in this theatre.

The rest is theatre history. In spite of all the rampaging, the piece was played right through to the end, with sensational success among most of the audience. It was living theatre in the best sense of the word. But, unfortunately, this was also the very last example of a free artistic theatre in Germany. The famous translator of Shakespeare, Hans Rothe, once wrote later that this was the hour in which the curtain rang down on the German stage.'

Note: the Berlin opening, scheduled for the following night (February 19) was scrapped.

(from *Sirk on Sirk*, Jon Halliday. To be published later this year in the Cinema One series.)

Postscript

In retrospect, the last sentence of the obituary cannot but strike one as a piece of unintentional irony, of the kind that is typical of much of Germany's cultural history. It is telling, for example, to realise that already in 1930 a reviewer who on the whole was particularly sympathetic to Douglas Sirk's work in the theatre, and who — at least in aesthetic matters — voiced the liberal opinions of the 'Kultur'-conscious German bourgeoisie, should end his article on what must now appear as a very sinister note. His pious wish for a German art protected from the evils of 'internationalism' was soon to be fulfilled by the most ruthless policy of institutionalised philistinism Germany had ever known. Nazi vilification of modernism, denounced and persecuted as 'degenerate

art', as well as the campaign against left-wing artists and intellectuals — who were accused of '*Kulturbolschevismus*' — managed to destroy German art of the post-war period more radically than any imaginary internationalist conspiracy. If it is generally accepted that the advent of the Third Reich signalled the demise of one of the most thriving periods in German theatrical history, one has to remember that the German theatre is unique among European theatrical traditions. Having emerged comparatively late — in the eighteenth century — the stage in Germany was, from the times of Lessing onwards dominated by dramatists with critical tendencies, and drama has only rarely been the privileged artistic mode and aesthetic experience of a single class, as was the case in France and post-Elizabethan England. On the whole, Germany has always produced what is called '*Weltanschauungstheater*', a theatre which focuses on the clash of different and incompatible ideologies rather than on conflicts of manners and social behaviour and its artistic continuity is not one of dramatic style or diction, but of social commitment.

In 1782 Friedrich Schiller put on his first play *Die Räuber*; a few weeks later he fled from Wurtemberg, his home state, because the Duke had forbidden him to write further plays and had put him under police surveillance. In 1933, about forty theatre producers all over Germany were suddenly told that they had been relieved of their functions, and Sirk was not one of them, his career is symptomatic. His artistic talents and intellectual interests made him one of the representative figures of that aspect of Germany's literary and theatrical tradition — socially committed, basically left-wing and uncompromisingly scathing about chauvinism and cultural provincialism in any form — which, though present since the Enlightenment, had never occupied such a central place in social and political life as it did in the 1920s. The more tragically ironic that he, along with so many others, had to leave Germany and was forced to spend his most creative years in Hollywood — significantly enough, the leading centre of 'internationalism' of the time.

Sirk's theatrical work is important in several respects. Above all, for the light it throws on the German theatre, because in his productions are resumed several interesting cross-currents of the contemporary theatre. Secondly, his work deserves to be regarded on its own merit; he was, from all accounts, an exceptionally gifted and versatile producer whose productions in Bremen, for example, lifted an average provincial stage to the rank of the very best German theatres, and his work in Leipzig and elsewhere received notices in all the major national papers. Finally, the choice of plays and the methods of his theatrical *mise-en-scène* gives us valuable information about his films, where themes and motifs turn up which bear an unmistakable relation to the dramas and comedies he staged during his period as a producer.

After a brief apprenticeship in Hamburg and Chemnitz, Sirk was given his first important post in 1923 at the Bremer Schauspielhaus, a privately-financed repertory theatre. There he immediately impressed audiences and critics by his imaginative and unconventional productions. The phrases which turn up most persistently in the early reviews are his 'ear for the inner melody of a play', his 'ability to weld the ensemble together', his *mise-en-scène* 'trembling with feeling, like inaudible music flowing warmly through the soul'.¹ The somewhat florid language makes it rather difficult to judge with any accuracy the type of style which Sirk adopted for his first independent productions, but when we come to the plays by Hebbel, put on in 1924 we get a better impression of Sirk's idea of the theatre: 'We have tried for the first time,' Sirk explained to his audience on the first night of *Judith und Holofernes*, 'to show the face of a thinker, tormented by doubt and his own conscience. His inner greatness, his superior intellect make him a solitary figure, whose haughtiness was as great as his longing for a human soul to share his spiritual insights was without remedy.'² As to the production, a critic described it as follows: 'Eight sharply delineated scenic images emerged from the darkness, and were again absorbed in it. The twilight of super-human worlds gave a curiously floodlit relief to his two main protagonists, whose fate it was to meet, in order for each to fulfil his own individual destiny.'³

What strikes one in Sirk's productions at this time are two things: His 'thematic' conception of a play, and his use of lighting. While seemingly sharing to some extent the monumentalising tendency of much German theatre and cinema of the period, Sirk clearly recognised that in order for a play to possess unity, the theatrical *mise-en-scène* must be organised around a certain dramatic idea, a single coherent interpretation, which translated into visual terms dominates the various elements, and that this idea would differ from one play to the next. This particular notion of the *mise-en-scène*, though perfectly conventional today, was something of a breakthrough at the time, intimately connected with the theatrical revolution brought about by expressionism. Although by 1924 expressionism as a protest movement was generally considered to be passé, partly because the deliberately subjective, emotional and anti-materialist analysis of social problems and political reality was felt to be ambiguous if not downright reactionary, its stylistic influence throughout the twenties remained undiminished. For whatever the shortcomings of the expressionists in terms of their political stance, their plays, both in thematic range as well as dramatic structure were a decisive rupture with naturalism, and a vital step towards the free handling of the scenic space and dramatic action which characterises the modern theatre. One of the consequences of this development was the preponderance of the producer and his contribution in relation to that of

the playwright. No doubt, the emergence of the *mise-en-scène* as the central concept of the theatrical creation was a gradual one, associated with the work of Wagner, Craig, Appia, Copeau, Meyerhold, who all in one way or another advocated the supremacy of movement, gesture, light, colour, sound, rhythm over the spoken word; in Germany the process was however, accelerated by the attack of the expressionists on the well-made play with its homogeneous, socially representative audience, and their demand for a stage with as little spatial circumscription as possible. Against the facsimile stage of naturalism, they wanted to 'open' the proscenium, make it transparent, which in turn created the need for an internally unifying principle in the visual and dramatic organisation of the individual performance, a task more and more explicitly assumed by the producer.

This unity Sirk interpreted in terms of giving space a specifically psychological notation, by a principle generally known as '*innere Regie*' (intrinsic *mise-en-scène*) as opposed to '*aussere Regie*', that is, a form or production which imposes unity by historically accurate sets and gestural realism. Thus, Sirk's productions were praised for their '*Raumgestaltung*', the way word and gesture defined the dramatic space, and his plays were said to have '*Seelenraum*', they delineated an inner world, which was given a clear and concrete embodiment by the manipulation of decor and movement (one critic speaks of Sirk's 'physical imagination'), and yet this world had also something 'unreal and spectral, without losing any of its force.'⁵ In Strindberg's *Dreamplay*, for example, 'the realm of the unconscious is extremely difficult to handle scenically', but Sirk had 'recreated every suggestive modulation of the work' by translating it into 'colour, rhythm, tone, until from the string of successive scenes emerged the grand symbol of a spiritual line, which gave to the poet's visions the metaphysical expansiveness of the imagination'.⁶ Such convincing play on the ambiguity of dream and reality was due, it seems, mainly to Sirk's use of lighting, the relation he created, sometimes by means of the 'skiopticon', the projected transparency, between background and action.

The combination of modern lighting techniques and a psycho-symbolic realism in Sirk's style could be seen most clearly in his production of Schiller's *Die Räuber* (October 1926). What the critics liked, in particular, was a scene in which a wholly subjective emotion of anguish and foreboding was transcribed into setting and decor by the skilful use of lighting and transparencies.

'The strongest confirmation of the producer's persuasive powers was the poetically superb Kosinski-scene, in which the setting sun plunges the forest into a mellow red light, which following the cue 'Amalie', Karl's imagination transforms magically into a scene in a park, where his brother Franz is trying to seduce and intimidate Karl's sweetheart. The absolute control over the scenic

image, which develops freely the main dramatic idea while leaving aside all rationalist stage technique, is a brilliant idea of the producer. It is the first striking success in Bremen of a new theatrical conception. The production showed quite clearly the concentrated energy of Sierck's work: discipline and intellectual grasp are the hallmarks of his achievement.' ⁷

Unlike other theatrical producers who later became film-directors Sirk's style owed little to Max Reinhardt, who was undoubtedly the greatest formative influence on directors like Lubitsch, Lang, Murnau and even Preminger. Reinhardt's idea of the theatre was a scenic-spectacular conception of the stage, with an emphasis on the mood and composition which was partly inspired by his passion for Renaissance painting, perhaps most successful in the adaptations of Shakespeare, for whom he started a veritable craze in Germany. What made Reinhardt leave Berlin and move to Vienna was the turn to 'reality', and the use of the theatre for directly social purposes. Sirk's forte, by contrast, was the '*Kammerspiel*', in which he could develop to perfection his own psychological-impressionist *mise-en-scène*, closer to the tradition of Otto Brahm and Leopold Jessner than to either Reinhardt or Piscator. One of his greatest successes in Bremen was Georg Kaiser's *Oktobertag* (*The Phantom Lover*), the curious story of a girl so much infatuated with a French officer who doesn't even notice her, that she believes him to be the father of her child, in actual fact conceived — as a result of a double case of mistaken identity — by a butcher's apprentice. Kaiser, perhaps the most prestigious playwright of the twenties, brings off this unlikely drama with all its ensuing complications by a subtly engineered psychological relativism, which leaves the audience guessing as to what moral lesson the author may have intended. (The officer, overwhelmed by the girl's genuine love, accepts the child as his, but is forced to dispose of the real father by running him through with his sabre.) Sirk's production stressed the 'inner truth of the play', giving every character a credible motivation and a convincing point of view, as against Kaiser's typical reliance on improbability and sheer chance. As in almost all of Sirk's work, the critics were at pains to stress the realism he managed to infuse into the apparently dream-like world. Hellmers had this to say:

'This production was of an exceptionally high standard, in the way the theatrical space suggested the basic moods and the world of the individual characters, but also in its timing, its rhythm — which most of the time was attuned to the protagonists' inner melody. In one respect, at least, Sierck's production undoubtedly surpassed the premiere in Berlin: that was in the convincingly realistic and natural conception of the butcher, as the man of the people. Through his performance, especially the third act became a unique dramatic experience.' ⁸

Equally suited to Sirk's style was the dramatic work of Hofmannsthal, whose poetic dream-plays were often difficult, if not impossible to stage adequately. In March 1928, Sirk put on *Der Turm*, an adaptation of

Calderon's *Life is a Dream*. While some of the socialist critics regarded Hofmannsthal with mixed feelings, asserting that:

'the idea of rejecting any kind of force or struggle for power in favour of understanding, forgiveness and communal harmony is so beautiful, so necessary, so promising for the future that it would have deserved a poetically more gripping and convincingly dramatic embodiment'.⁹

Hellmers pointed out that Sirk had managed to give form to the contemporary aspect of the drama in our own time, shaken by wars and revolution.

He goes on:

'the strongest element in the play is the idea of power embodied in the king, and the notion that from crime only hatred, fear, cruelty and loneliness will grow, which in turn cannot but produce brutality, revolt and murder. In this context, the child-like wonder and innocent purity of the prince, severed from all human contact, a martyr of humanity who only follows his inner light in the dark dungeon of the self, is particularly moving. His pallid, spiritually translucent traits shine through the labyrinth of the action.'¹⁰

Although perhaps dealing with a rather more otherworldly and ethereal subject than Sirk's films, some of which he likes to describe as 'guttie', we have here one of the plays in which he could formulate in dramatic terms certain themes which have remained constants in his work: power and vitality corrupted and at the same time ennobled by a feeling of quasi-metaphysical guilt, the emergence of an individual conscience in an essentially public or political context — themes which one can detect in his remarks about *Anthony and Cleopatra* but which are equally present in his interpretation of Schiller and Hebbel — both dramatists whose plays he repeatedly staged throughout his career.

If playwrights like Hofmannsthal, Kaiser, Schnitzler gave Sirk an opportunity to become a master in the style which one critic described as 'the intimate art of direction and ensemble-work, that subtle mood which concentrates all the nervous fibres of an audience, uniting stage and auditorium in a communion of shared feeling', he also produced plays of an entirely different kind, and which testify to the political and social commitment which he tried to put across on the stage. Although in many ways restricted in his choice by the select and predominantly middle-class audience in the private theatre at Bremen, he managed to put on some highly controversial plays, whether revivals of classics (cf Hellmers' disapproving comments on his interpretation of *Oedipus Rex*) or modern plays.

The most significant productions of this kind were those of Bronnen and Brecht. Arnolt Bronnen, a friend of Brecht who later became a Nazi and eventually ended up in East Germany after the war, was a highly successful dramatist. Both he and Brecht belonged in their early days to what was called 'black expressionism' plays, a movement which attempted to destroy expressionist idealism by showing instinct and un-

disguised sensuality as the motive forces of human behaviour. Brecht's *Baal*, *Trommeln in die Nacht* (*Drums in the Night*), *Im Dickicht der Städte* (*The Jungle of Cities*), with their emphasis on sadism, sex, violence, perversion and megalomania were intended to shock both the bourgeoisie and the liberals. Bronnen on the other hand, specialised in plays which had a certain topical relevance and a confused, but dramatically effective political stance. For example, he wrote *Rheinische Rebellen* — a play about popular resistance in the French-occupied Rhineland and a later work *Reparationen*, dealt with the misery and injustice engendered by the Versailles Treaty and Germany's payment of war-damages to France. In 1925 Sirk put on *Rheinische Rebellen*, whose plot was a skilful mixture of politics, sex, assassination, spying, lesbianism and murder — a kind of political sexploitation thriller which could only have been written in the wild and confused days of Weimar Germany. The play was generally considered to be artistically worthless, but it gave a gifted producer an ideal opportunity to 'have fun' and prove his talent. One critic wrote of Sirk's production:

'That the political verbiage indiscriminately thundering from the right and the left received strong applause, lies in the nature of such phrasemongery and its audience. But the applause was also due — and this we gratefully acknowledge — to the incredibly skilful and extremely tactful direction (even in the lesbian bed-scene) by Detlef Sierck, who gave very convincing proof of his intelligence and ability. A pity that such a polished production wasn't devoted to a more deserving play.'

And commenting on Sirk's *mise-en-scène*, the same critic adds:

'Richard Lamey (a regular collaboration on the sets during Sirk's Bremen period) created a stage design which impressively excluded all naturalistic associations and which, by its unearthly strangeness gave the producer a free hand to develop his scenic ideas. Sierck moved his figures in a sharply controlled rhythm and a masterful dramatic pace, whose breathless speed made high demands on actors and audience alike. But only through speed can such a play be put across at all, because there is neither spiritual nor intellectual movement, and thus everything depends on the producer. That Sierck interpreted, as it were, the lines of the characters as spoken stage-directions, and thus reached a theatrical climax, even where there wasn't a dramatic one — that in itself made the production worthwhile.'¹¹

Of Brecht, Sirk staged the *Dreigroschenoper* (*Threepenny Opera*) (April 1929; world première: Berlin, August 1928) which today he sees very much as the work of Kurt Weill. It seems that Sirk toned down the diverse ruptures in style,¹² and a Hamburg critic who speaks of the production as a great success, even a 'sensation', points out how it 'managed to fuse the garish mosaic of different poetic and musical material and tendencies into a unified shape of disciplined lively and exciting effectiveness.'¹³ Even a conservative critic who saw in the texts nothing but a 'wrinkly old aunt from England, whose face has been tarted-up' and who considered Weill's songs 'an a-tonal mish-mash of sounds without contrast', 'an American bluff which leaves a stale taste', noted

the 'cinema-like production' and ended by saying that 'the whole thing was far more agreeable than the original Berlin production, which put too much emphasis on the erotic element in the whore scenes and too much gruesomeness into the hanging.'¹⁴

From 1930 onwards, after Sirk had moved to Leipzig and had got control of the municipal theatre, his political convictions became more apparent, if only because his position was more precarious, given the rapidly changing climate. One of his very first productions, *Im Namen des Volkes* (*In the Name of the People*) — a play about the trial of the anarchistic Sacco and Vanzetti — created a minor political scandal, and was subsequently banned. 'It gave me a rather bad name in Leipzig,'¹⁵ Sirk remembers, and he was able to hang on to his post after 1933 only because the mayor of Leipzig who knew Hitler personally, was well-disposed towards Sirk. But it was under the pressure of the authorities who interfered more and more in the running of the theatre and dictated the choice of productions that he decided to go into movies — an industry which because of its international prestige was at that time far less rigorously controlled by the Nazis than the theatre.

Sirk ended his theatrical career in Leipzig with a bang; his production of Kaiser's *Silbersee* was one of the stormiest episodes in his entire career. Sirk's own account of it is published above in the letter he wrote to Bavarian radio in 1969. (See 'Documents on Sirk' above)

Perhaps one ought to be grateful for the turn of events which made Sirk devote himself to the cinema. Although, even today, he considers his theatre work more important, more accomplished than any of his films, the perishable nature of that work doesn't allow us to admire the genius of his visual imagination, his gift for the dramatic potential of colour, his sense of rhythm and movement in any other than its cinematic form.

Curiously enough, Hellmers' wish to see Sirk perpetrate German art has come true, though not in the way he had in mind. In joining Hollywood, Sirk became one of those who took what was best in the German cultural tradition to the United States, transmuting it into an idiom which became an enduring part of the American cinema.

T.E.

FOOTNOTES

1. *33 Jahre Bremer Schauspielhaus*, pp 86, 87.
2. *ibid*, p 91.
3. *ibid*, p 93.
4. *ibid*, p 89.
5. *ibid*, p 93.
6. *ibid*, p 100.
7. *Bremer Nachrichten*, 17 October, 1926.

8. *Bremer Nachrichten*, 21 October, 1928.
9. *Bremer Volkszeitung*, 6 March, 1928.
10. *Bremer Nachrichten*, 4 March, 1928.
11. *Bremer Nachrichten*, 28 September, 1925.
12. Sirk's own estimate of his production is at variance with this opinion: 'I played it *extremely* harsh, extremely revolutionary, let's say, as I called it then — more so, I think in a way than really Brecht had wanted it.' (*Sirk on Sirk*, by Jon Halliday, to be published later this year in the *Cinema One* series.)
13. *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, June 1929.
14. *Bremer Zeitung*, 22 April, 1929.
15. *Sirk on Sirk*.

I would like to thank Jon Halliday for making available the various documents relating to Sirk's theatre work, for his comments and for letting me see the manuscript of *Sirk on Sirk*.

Two NEW Colour Films on WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Understanding Shakespeare: His Stagecraft

16 mm. Colour and Sound.
Running Time 25 minutes.

Understanding Shakespeare: His Sources

16 mm. Colour and Sound.
Running Time 20 minutes.

These films are all-British productions photographed in Warwickshire and London by GATEWAY EDUCATIONAL FILMS LTD.

A cast of first-class Shakespearean actors presents incidents in the life of William Shakespeare and performs extracts from his plays on a reconstruction of the stage of the Globe Theatre. For colour brochure and details for purchase or hire apply to:



GATEWAY

EDUCATIONAL
FILMS LTD.

St. Lawrence House, Broad St., Bristol BS1 2HF. Tel.: 0272 25351

The Theatre of Expressionism

H. F. Garten

While expressionism in the visual arts has found recognition in this country in recent years, its literary equivalent has never had much of a hearing. The reasons are obvious: expressionism as a literary movement was a specifically German phenomenon closely tied to social and political factors at a given historical period. Moreover, it evolved its own verbal expression which has no equivalent in the English language. Full credit must therefore be given to the publishers Calder and Boyars for launching a series devoted to German expressionist drama. So far four volumes have appeared, edited by J. M. Ritchie, who also signs as the translator of most of the plays.*

What is — or rather, what was expressionism? No single definition has ever been found, for the term covers a wide variety of artistic forms. By common consent the name applies to a German aesthetic movement affecting visual art, writing, music, and film, and ranging roughly from 1910 to 1924. It coincided with the two main events of that period, the First World War and the revolution following it. Though it was closely connected with these events it was by no means their product. For it clearly preceded the war by several years: the impending cataclysm registered in the mind before it happened in reality.

In the field of literature, expressionism first found its voice in lyric poetry. For lyric poetry is by its very nature subjective — and extreme subjectivism is the hallmark of expressionism, at any rate in its early stages. At first, it made itself felt in the quickening of language, in new and bold imagery, in a breaking-up of traditional forms. This new spirit soon invaded the drama — in fact, expressionism found its most potent form in the theatre. Subjective drama? This seems a contradiction in

* *Seven Expressionist Plays*, £2.25; *Vision and Aftermath*. 4 *Expressionist War Plays*, £2.25; *Carl Sternheim, Plays*, £2.50; *Georg Kaiser, 5 Plays*, £2.75. In the following, works contained in one of these volumes are marked with an asterisk.

terms. For drama presupposes conflict between opposing characters, seen objectively. Expressionist drama could never quite resolve this paradox — it never shed its lyrical descent. Its very language is poetic — not in the sense of traditional verse drama but as a mode of expression suited to its intense emotive emphasis. Expressionism forged its own language — or rather, every expressionist writer coined his own idiom, from the terse ejaculations of August Stramm to the cold precision of Georg Kaiser. In this process, grammar and syntax were ruthlessly overthrown, articles eliminated, sentences clipped, new words created. In some instances, the dialogue was reduced to bare exclamations; the ecstatic cry was the ultimate in expressionist diction.

It is no mere accident that the first attempt at expressionist drama was by a painter — Oscar Kokoschka's *Murderer Hope of Womanhood** (1907). It has all the marks of the expressionist style: violent, explosive diction, reduction of the characters to nameless types (*The Man, Woman*, etc), elimination of all realistic detail, concentration on the essential. This little play anticipates the essence of expressionism: the ethical, mystical, even religious impulse, the striving for a higher level of existence, attained through torment and suffering. It moves, however, in a timeless, mythical realm, devoid of any social relevance. The same applies to some other short plays contained in the first volume, such as *Awakening** by August Stramm and a dramatic fragment by Franz Kafka, *The Guardian of the Tomb*.* It was, however, social relevance which gave expressionist drama its revolutionary force. By and by, contemporary reality in its manifold facets — the big city, the machine, capitalism, war — began to intrude, symbolizing a corrupt society from which the expressionist 'hero' tries to break away or which he seeks to transform in the light of his vision. Thus expressionist drama acquired a messianic fervour which, around 1918, reached a revolutionary pitch in the plays of Georg Kaiser, Ernst Toller, Hasenclever, Unruh, and a host of minor playwrights.

However, expressionist drama had yet another source: the grotesque tragi-comedies of that solitary figure, FRANK WEDEKIND. Of course Wedekind cannot be classified as an expressionist. His most successful plays, *Spring's Awakening* and the two Lulu dramas, *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box*, were written before and shortly after the turn of the century, years before the movement got under way. But his dramatic style, equally far removed from naturalism as from symbolism, foreshadows things to come: the world is seen out of focus, the characters are either over or undersized. The targets of his scorn are caricatures in a grotesquely distorted world. His central theme: the elemental force of sex and its antagonism to a society hemmed in by hypocritical conventions. Though not revolutionary in a socio-political sense, this gospel

was rightly felt to be an open challenge to accepted moral standards. (One or more volumes of Wedekind's plays are promised for a later date in the series under review.)

Wedekind's direct successor is CARL STERNHEIM. One or two of his plays have been staged in this country, in translations by Ashley Dukes and Eric Bentley. But his brand of comedy is foreign to the English tradition. The social class he savagely satirizes is the bourgeoisie of the Kaiser's Germany, with its hollow pomposity, its philistinism, its brutal self-assertion. Sternheim saw himself as a German Molière, holding up the mirror to his time. The long line of comedies devoted to this purpose bears the collective title *From the Heroic Life of the Middle Classes*. Several of these plays form a kind of family saga, showing the rise of a family (with the significant name of 'Maske') through three generations from the lower middle class to the top of the social ladder — a rise achieved by cynical brutality and disregard of all moral scruples. Four of these plays — *The Bloomers*,* *The Snob*,* *1913*,* and *The Fossil* * — are included in the volume dedicated to Sternheim. The fifth is *Paul Schippel, Esq* * — a kind of inverted *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, only that here a proletarian upstart ascends successfully to middle-class status by virtue of his beautiful tenor voice.

Although Sternheim continued writing up to the late twenties, he belongs essentially to the years preceding the First World War. One of his plays bears the significant title *1913*. It shows society on the eve of the war: the capitalist system is carried to the extreme; materialism and the struggle for power dominate life. But there is a premonition of imminent catastrophe. 'Après nous le déluge. We are ripe!' comments one of the characters. The play ends in a ghostly dance of death of a society doomed to extinction.

Though Sternheim's satirical punch and hectic dialogue foreshadow expressionism, he cannot be called an expressionist. His method is purely destructive; he has no values to set against the false gods he relentlessly ridicules, save those of unscrupulous egotism and ruthless self-assertion. However, he has an asset rare among German playwrights — the gift of comedy. It is not surprising that his plays have worn better than those of most of his contemporaries — in fact, there has been a virtual Sternheim renaissance in the German theatre during these last years. It is doubtful whether anything similar can happen here. By and large, his dramatic form still runs on the lines of conventional comedy, and his targets are too closely bound to his own country and period.

The year 1910 saw a sudden creative outburst, a new intellectual climate from which expressionism was born. The movement was carried by a new generation born in the 1880s and '90s. Almost without exception its protagonists went through the holocaust of the 1914-18 war from

which they received a decisive impulse. The war shattered the social fabric against which they had revolted; it created the chaos they had foreshadowed in their visions. From out of this chaos arose the cry for a new world of social justice and brotherhood. In this way, expressionism turned into a political and revolutionary force, preparing the way for the overthrow of the Wilhelmine state and the foundation of a new social order. Finally, in 1918, after the abolition of censorship, the full flood of revolutionary drama burst forth, partly before the end of the fighting.

This development is clearly reflected in the volume entitled *Vision and Aftermath*, containing four war plays. The first is that remarkable instance of prophetic inspiration, *War*,* subtitled *A Te Deum*, by Carl Hauptmann, written in 1913. The author's earlier works had been naturalistic or neo-romantic, like those of his more famous brother Gerhart Hauptmann. In this play, however, he clearly approached expressionism. The whole action, centring on a devastating European war, has a visionary quality. A surreal note is struck from the start: representatives of the European powers assemble in the guise of animals. The meeting soon degenerates into a heated argument in which each nation stakes its territorial claims. When the dispute reaches its height, an archangel strides down the village street and, through the mouth of a 'prophet of doom', announces the coming of war. The war scenes themselves are still in terms of old-fashioned wars, with their pitched battles and bivouac fires. The demon of war appears in the mask of Napoleon, standing on a chariot drawn by frantic crowds. The last act shows the world plunged into total devastation; the surviving cripples dwell in earth holes, greedily digging for relics of the past and living in fear of each other. Yet a faint message of hope rings out at the end: as the sun rises over the desolate plane, the cripples crawl out of their holes and a young woman, raising her new-born child to the sky, breaks into a fervent prayer. . . . This extraordinary play anticipates not only the universal cataclysm of the war but also the faint ray of light which emerged at its end.

During the early part of the war, all anti-war pronouncements were silenced by the patriotic wave that swept Germany as it did all the belligerent nations. However, from about 1916 onwards, a whole line of anti-war plays began to appear. One of the first was *Naval Encounter** (*Seeschlacht*) by Reinhard Goering, which must rank as one of the highlights of expressionist drama. Its single act is set in the gun-turret of a German battleship before and during the battle of Jutland (or Skagerrak, as the Germans call it). The characters are seven unnamed sailors.

The play moves with the inexorability of Greek tragedy. Its central scene is an argument between the First and the Fifth sailor on the question of obedience, leading up to a first dim conception of rebellion. It culmin-

ates in the Fifth sailor's resolution to disobey battle orders. But at this moment enemy ships are sighted, and the battle is joined. One after another, the sailors are killed; finally, an explosion wrecks the gun-turret. The play closes with a question raised by the dying Fifth sailor: 'I've made a good gunner, eh? I'd have made a good mutineer, too! But firing a gun came easier, eh? Must just have come easier?' — The idea of mutiny is once more lost in the fever of battle. The war is felt to be a superhuman force, embodied in the battleship in which the sailors are imprisoned, without a will of their own, without a chance of escape or resistance.

The call to revolution rings out with full force in Walter Hasenclever's version of *Antigone*,* published in 1917. Hasenclever won fame on the eve of war with his play *The Son*, the first truly expressionist play to reach the stage. In his *Antigone*, he uses the ancient tragedy to proclaim his message of peace and raise the call for revolution. The play is a perfect example of the expressionist manner: the language, austere and sparing, is shorn of all poetic adornments, rising now and again to ecstatic outbursts. Creon, the king, is a distinct portrait of the Kaiser, while Antigone, defying the king's orders, becomes a herald of peace and universal love. Her call 'All men are brethren!' rings out to the people, stirring them to rebellion. To the king's face, she announces the end of his reign of force and the dawn of a new world of freedom. Creon himself, shaken by a vision of the war he has unleashed, resigns the throne and sets out to atone for his crimes. At the end, the masses surge forward to establish the new world of peace and love, led by a simple 'man of the people':

Palaces totter. Might has had its day.

He who was great, plunges to his doom . . .

Follow me! I will lead you.

The wind rises from the ruins.

The new world dawns.

Though written while the war was still in progress, Hasenclever's play catches perfectly the mood prevailing at its end. At its numerous performances in the immediate post-war years, it was acclaimed as a revolutionary manifesto.

The last play included in the volume *Vision and Aftermath* is Ernst Toller's *Hinkemann*,* written in 1921-22. This is certainly not a 'war play' in the strict sense but belongs to what is meant by its 'aftermath'. Of all the expressionist playwrights, Toller is the one best known outside Germany. Translations of most of his plays were published in the twenties and thirties. This is not necessarily due to their intrinsic value but to the fact that they translated the spiritual impulse of expressionism into concrete political terms. Toller represents the activist, political side of the movement. Having joined the army as a volunteer at the outbreak

of war, he underwent in the trenches, like so many others, a profound conversion. This experience is reflected in his first play, *Die Wandlung* (*Transfiguration*). At the end of the war, he joined the extreme Left and took a leading part in the Bavarian Communist uprising. His next plays, *Masses and Man*, *Hinkemann*, and *The Machine Wreckers* (about the Luddites), were written in prison. They clearly reflect the change of mood in the immediate post-war years, from utopian hope to utter disillusion. At the same time, they indicate the gradual return from expressionist abstraction to a more realistic plane. The characters are no longer nameless types but sharply drawn individuals, and the setting is clearly defined.

Hinkemann is one of a long line of plays centring on the ex-soldier who is unable to adjust himself to civilian life (Brecht's *Drums in the Night* is another). Its central figure is a working-class man who has lost his virility through a war injury. He sees in this a symbol of the times: 'I am as ridiculous as the age we live in, as sadly ridiculous as our own age. Our age has no soul. I have no sex.' Embittered by his suffering, Hinkemann reproaches men for their callousness and apathy. In a nightmarish vision, a cross-section of the time unfolds before his eyes — war cripples singing martial songs, revolutionaries storming barricades, news-vendors shouting sensational headlines. . . . The play ends in utter despair, with Hinkemann lamenting the futility of war and the apathy of men. . . .

Toller's drama stands at the end of the expressionist upheaval: the clumsy, inarticulate ex-soldier lost in a hostile world is no longer the herald of a new age: he is a plain man of the people whose protest springs from real suffering and a dim perception of life's injustice — a modern counterpart to Büchner's poor soldier *Woyzeck*.

Seen in conjunction, the four plays collected in this volume trace the development of the expressionist movement from its inception to its end, with the war as its central experience.

The last volume to be published so far is wholly devoted to GEORG KAISER, containing five of his most significant plays. Kaiser was no doubt the leading dramatist of German expressionism. He was the only one to mould its white-hot effusions in a balanced form. In his plays, the explosive force of the expressionist message is counterpoised by a sense of proportion, a calculating intellect which sees in every play a logical task: 'To write a play is to think a thought to its conclusion.' This insistence on the predominance of 'thought' earned him the name of *Denkspieler* — an intellectual juggler lacking in human warmth. Kaiser himself scorned this criticism, insisting on the oneness of 'thinking' and 'feeling'.

Kaiser was in his 40th year when the performance of his *Burghers of Calais* * in 1917 carried him to fame overnight. From then on until 1933 no less than thirty-eight plays of his were produced on the German stage. After that, his amazing productivity continued until his death in exile in 1945. The peak of his career, however, coincided with the full tide of the expressionist movement, from 1917 to 1923. .

The five plays selected for this volume are among the most significant in Kaiser's vast output. *The Burghers of Calais*, his first resounding success, strikes the keynote of his entire work. It is anything but an historical play in the conventional sense. As always, Kaiser uses the historical theme to convey his own message — the 'regeneration of man'. Here it rings out for the first time when the blind old father stands by the body of his son who has offered himself so that the town might be spared: 'I have seen the New Man — in this night he was born!' It is this central idea, more than anything else, which stamps Kaiser as an expressionist. Though written in 1912, the play was first performed only in 1917, when it was at once acclaimed as a triumph of expressionist drama and as a fervent denunciation of militarism.

From Morning to Midnight * is probably Kaiser's most famous play: a bank clerk, acting on a sudden impulse, absconds with a large sum of money and strives to make up for a lifetime of frustration. In the course of twelve hours, he hurries through various stages, in a hectic quest for a new and intense experience of life. Finally, he ends up at a meeting of the salvation army, realizing the futility of his search. Mounting the platform, he scatters the money among the crowd who instantly start to fight for it. Utterly disillusioned, he shoots himself. This play has become the very model of expressionist drama: grotesque distortion of the outside world, reduction of the characters to social types, white-hot, hectic diction, and, as its essence, the 'transformation' of a man from a humdrum life to a new level of existence.

The three remaining plays (competently translated by B. J. Kenworthy) form a consistent whole, known as the *Gas* trilogy. They form a sequence ranging over three generations, very much like Sternheim's trilogy of the Maske family. But Kaiser's scope is much wider: while Sternheim confines himself to pre-war bourgeois society, Kaiser's cycle encompasses the entire evolution of capitalism. He begins where Sternheim, in 1913, left off. The central figure of the first play, *The Coral*,* is the Millionaire, who has ruthlessly made his way from utter poverty. To assuage his conscience, he lavishes charity on anybody in need. But when his son, for whom he has accumulated all his wealth, renounces it and joins the workers, he opts out of the rat-race and seeks mental peace in exchange for another man's life. For his crime, he pays the death penalty. But he has gained a deeper happiness than he has ever known: 'I have re-

gained the paradise that lies behind us!' he exclaims as he is led to his death.

Gas, too, is concerned with paradise regained, but now it embraces not merely a single individual but the whole of mankind. Its herald is the Millionaire's son, who had revolted against his father. He has taken over the plant which produces 'gas' — the motive power of the machine which enslaves man. But the gas explodes, shattering the works. The millionaire's son refuses to rebuild them. Instead, he proposes resettling the workers on the land, to restore man to his pristine wholeness. Mankind stands at the cross-roads. But the workers reject his call and decide to rebuild the factory — even at the risk of new explosions. The prophet has failed. But with his dying words he foresees a future when his vision of the New Man will come true: 'Was he not close to me? Must he not arrive — tomorrow and tomorrow?! Am I not a witness to him?' To which his daughter replies: 'I will give him birth!'

This powerful play, which had its first performance a fortnight after the Armistice in November 1918, stands as a towering peak of expressionist drama. Although it had no immediate relevance to political issues, its fervent call for social regeneration, its vision of an utopian future made it the pre-eminent play of the German revolution. Two years later, 1920, Kaiser added a Second Part, known as *Gas II*.^{*} It carries the theme to its ultimate conclusion. Industrial mechanization has reached its final phase: men are reduced to mere automatons tending the machines. A war is in progress, and 'gas' is used exclusively for war production. The two sides are designated simply as Blue and Yellow Figures, their speech is reduced to mechanical formulas. Owing to a decline in the output of gas, the war is lost, and the workers assume control. Once more a prophet stands up — the promised son of the previous play, now simply a worker among workers. He exhorts the workers to renounce the production of gas and to unite with the enemy in a bond of universal brotherhood. But the enemy disregards the call and takes over control. Once again, a choice marks a cross-roads in man's history: annihilation through poison gas or inner freedom through tacit submission? The workers choose poison gas, that is, brute force. Whereupon the millionaire-worker offers to throw the bomb himself. The end is a lurid tableau of total annihilation — a prophetic anticipation of the nuclear bomb.

The contrast between the utopian hope of *Gas I* and the pessimism of *Gas II* reflects the road the German revolution travelled in those two years. These two plays mark the culminating point of the expressionist movement. From then it gradually declined and by 1924 petered out, giving way to a new kind of realism. Kaiser was the only one among its major authors to maintain, down to his end, the emotional pitch and

ethical challenge of expressionism, though in a modified form. (It is to be hoped that the publishers will fulfil their promise and add one or more volumes of Kaiser's later plays to their series.)

Although expressionism as a recognizable movement had spent its force by 1924, its repercussions continued for a long time — indeed, they are still with us today. After the failure of the 1918 revolution to create the new society they had visualized, the expressionist writers split into various groups, each pursuing its own end. Some (like Toller and, later, Brecht) embraced communism as an active creed, others (like Hans Johst) ended up as fervent apostles of Hitler. Thus the German theatre of the twenties shows a wide variety of conflicting trends. Can Ivan Goll, for instance, still be called an expressionist? His play *Methusalem or The Eternal Bourgeois*,* written and produced in 1922 with décor by George Grosz, shows the influence of French surrealism; it even anticipates the Theatre of the Absurd. And what about that great and lonely figure, Ernst Barlach? His play *Squire Blue Boll* * of 1926 concludes the volume of *Seven Expressionist Plays* opening with Kokoschka's early playlet. Like Kokoschka, Barlach was one of those rare artists who expressed themselves through two different media. Both his sculptures and his plays are imbued with the same spirit, blending earthy realism with mystical overtones. His characters are weighed down by the heavy skies of his native northern Germany. Yet they grope, in their ponderous way, for the light. This blend of realism and mysticism, combined with grotesque elements, marks all his plays. *Squire Blue Boll* is his last stagework before he was ostracized by the Nazis. Boll is a robust landowner, earthbound and self-confident, given to the pleasures of the flesh — a kinsman of Brecht's Puntila. Through a series of strange experiences, he undergoes a transformation: he breaks the chain of his narrow existence and sets out to seek the spiritual meaning of life, giving birth to a 'new Boll'. No doubt one can see in this play still a late offshoot of expressionism. However, its central idea — the regeneration of man — is no longer expressed in abstract terms but in characters of flesh and blood.

These four volumes present a wide and varied picture of that fascinating phenomenon, German expressionist drama. Admittedly, its translation into English poses almost insurmountable problems. To what extent can the unique character of expressionist diction be rendered in another language? The closer one gets to the original, the more difficult the task; the freer the translation, the less is left of the authentic flavour. Mr Ritchie, who has translated most of the plays, succeeds in some, and fails in others. Nevertheless we are greatly obliged to him and the publishers for having opened up this rich mine of dramatic achievement which has so vitally influenced the theatre of our time.

The German Film 1933-1945

Clive Coultass

It may seem surprising at first that in spite of an enormous mass of published material on the Third Reich and much specifically about Nazi propaganda there has been no book before Hull's which gives any adequate account in English of the German Cinema of the period 1933-45.* In fact the reasons are not hard to find. The subject is a particularly difficult one for a film historian outside Germany, partly because of the almost total disappearance of most of these films from the normal viewing circuits for obvious political reasons and also as Hull indicates in his prologue because of the relatively low priority attached to their preservation in the world's film archives.

A further cause of neglect has been the plain fact that on aesthetic grounds alone the films of this era of modern German history do not rate very highly. The arrival of the Nazis crushed creative life out of the German film industry. Most major directors, Jewish and non-Jewish, fled abroad. There is no real parallel say with music where a composer like Richard Strauss or a conductor like Furtwängler could survive the regime by making uneasy compromises. A film maker had little alternative. Either films reflected National Socialist ideology in some way or they merely became escapist. As it happens the majority fell into the latter category and it is a tradition which even contemporary German cinema has hardly shaken off.¹ There is no parallel either with the cinema of another Fascist country such as Mussolini's Italy where in spite of everything the foundations of neo-realism were already present and where an *Osessione* managed to emerge while the dictator was still in power.

Hull says that his slim, highly priced volume is intended only to

* David Stewart Hull, *Film In The Third Reich*, University of California Press, £4.25.

'stimulate interest' and maybe it would be kindest to accept that claim quite literally. It is the product of nine years of film viewing from New York to East Berlin (surprisingly he seems to have missed the Imperial War Museum which has one of the largest collections of Nazi films outside Germany). The book only marginally overlaps Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* which apart from a short supplement goes no further than 1933.

Everyone nowadays loves to snipe at Kracauer. Of him, Hull says that he 'would seem to advance the theory that most of the industry sympathised with the Nazis from 1919 on, perhaps unwittingly'. This I feel to be a staggering misunderstanding of Kracauer's view of the relationship of art and society. Even in a more specific criticism of Kracauer, in reference to the Nazi content respectively of Trenker's ² *Der Rebell* (1932) and Ucicky's *Morgenrot* (1933), Hull is not on happy ground. His opinion, directly opposite to Kracauer's, that *Morgenrot* was 'far more the prototype of the Nazi film than *Der Rebell*', ignores the appeal of the revolutionary aspect of *Der Rebell* to the Nazis who were intent at that time on building up a dynamic image of themselves. Moreover, the situation in *Morgenrot* of a U-boat actually being sunk with great loss of life is unimaginable in the later Nazi cinema.

Using as his main theme the take-over by Goebbels of real power in the German film industry Hull follows a chronological path, year by year. He gives short synopses and evaluations of individual films, most of them unknown and unlikely to be seen in Britain. The book puts up a case for a revival of some of them, notably for Wysbar's *Fährmann Maria* (1936) and for a whole series of films made between 1939 and 1945 by Helmut Käutner.³ Although there are occasional inaccuracies of detail many of the actual judgements are fairly reliable. I doubt anyway if almost anyone else in Britain or America will find the opportunity to view so many of these films. Perhaps no one else will think most of them are worth it. A few are treated in more depth and these include *Titanic*, whose director, Selpin, was driven to suicide by the SS, the fascinating *Münchhausen* by Josef von Baky, and Veit Harlan's spectacular colour film *Kolberg* which tried to drum up last ditch resistance to the allies by an analogy with an incident in the Napoleonic period. As well as hoping to emulate Soviet film propaganda Goebbels wanted the bigger Nazi films to rival Hollywood's. In this respect they were failures but they still have some interest in their political context and it was a pity that last year's Third Reich season at the National Film Theatre could produce only a 16 mm black and white print of *Kolberg*.

Those needing a framework for some basic knowledge of Nazi feature film production may find Hull's book useful and informative. Unfortunately in other respects an opportunity has been missed. The author's dis-

cursive style does not allow him to throw any real illumination on the inter-relationship of film, politics and history, to my mind the only ultimate justification for a lengthy work on Nazi cinema.

The only general history of the Third Reich quoted in the bibliography is the not fully satisfactory one by Shirer. The personal interview, on which Hull places some reliance, is a suspect tool for historians and surely never more so than in the instance of former Nazi film directors. I doubt if one can expect any of these to be totally frank about their past.

The frankness or otherwise of Leni Reifenstahl is still a matter for argument. Hull writes of *Triumph des Willens*: 'Since so much untruth has been spread about this film, it is necessary to go into the film's genesis in some detail.'

This he fails to do, neither explaining the alleged 'untruth' nor going far beyond recounting an interview (not by himself) with the director. On the surface it seems that Hull is prepared to accept Leni Riefenstahl's statement that she undertook the commission to make the film with reluctance and her contention that while the film was distributed by the NSDAP the finance was provided by her own company. This claim, which obviously affects the copyright of the film, was turned down by the West German Supreme Court quite recently. Leni Riefenstahl's own writings in 1935 conflict with her post-war pretensions that *Triumph des Willens* is an objective documentary of a historical event. It was in fact an artistic re-creation of the Nürnberg Party Congress in which the actual events were manoeuvred out of their genuine sequence by skilful editing in order to make the maximum didactic effect.

In pointing to these facts I am not trying to take some kind of self-righteous standpoint. There were films far more disagreeable than *Triumph des Willens*. The director of the nastiest Nazi film, the virulently anti-Semitic *Der Ewige Jude*, rightly classed by Hull as 'pornography', works now as a travel agent at Berchtesgaden. The most banal films were produced by Karl Ritter, whose ludicrous Luftwaffe film *Stukas* (1941) culminates in a final scene where a psychologically depressed pilot is cured instantly on hearing Siegfried's Rhine journey at Bayreuth, and he also returned to West Germany after the war. But some of the recent admiration for Leni Riefenstahl in Britain and America needs to be qualified.

Although a remarkable film in many ways *Triumph des Willens* is not entirely the original masterpiece it is sometimes claimed to be. The director certainly brought great gifts of organisation to the film but she owed much also to her chief cameraman Sepp Allgeier and to a camera style already developing in German documentary film and which led eventually to the characteristic form of the wartime newsreel. The in-

flated tone of the film partly derives from Arnold Fanck's ⁴ pseudo-mystical mountain epics. The euphoric lyrical romanticism of the early part of *Triumph des Willens* gradually crumbles in face of the repetitive banality of the Rally and the empty rhetoric of the Führer. The mood is more easily sustained, in spite of the length of the film, in the monumental *Olympia*. Here the propagandist element is less obvious but again the Anglo-Saxon admirers of the film might one day view the German language version which was much more blatantly pro-Nazi than the prints released for world distribution. All this is not meant to imply of course that Leni Riefenstahl does not regret her early infatuation with Hitler and his movement.

A major disappointment of Hull's *Film in the Third Reich* is that in following fashionable film aesthetics he deals only cursorily with the non-feature film. Walter Ruttmann, who continued to produce films into the Second World War, does not rate a mention. Perhaps in a way this is as well. Ruttmann ⁵ is best remembered by his early silent film *Berlin*. His later style in his industrial films is all too clearly imitated in the Deutsche Wochenschau newsreel, chief instrument of Goebbel's film propaganda. Nazism was not an isolated European phenomenon and this whole question of its use of film deserves one day a more thorough analysis.

FOOTNOTES

1. For a contrary view see the 'Notes on Sirk's German Films' by Jon Halliday in this issue. (S.R.)
2. Luis TRENKER (1903(?)-): Actor and director, former mountain guide. For a time collaborated with Fank and Riefenstahl on 'mountain' films. He made numerous documentaries and after 1945 a few feature films before forming his own production company in Munich.
3. Helmut KAUTNER: born in Dusseldorf in 1908, worked as actor and script-writer and was one of the major German directors of the mid-forties. Recent directing has been limited to stage and television. Films include: *Unter den Brücken* (45) and *Grosse Freiheit Nr 7* (44).
4. Arnold FANK (1889-). Pioneer of 'mountain' films — a particular genre of nature film using the power of mountain landscape for dramatic cinematic effect often in tension with the fate of the individual climber. Founder of the Freiburg school of cameramen, instrumental in launching Leni Riefenstahl as a director.
5. Walter RUTTMAN (1887-1941): Director and director of photography. Served as a Lieutenant in the First World War on the Eastern Front, trained as a painter under Angelo Jank and was for a time a successful poster designer. Also studied architecture. At first made abstract films, after 1927 turned to documentaries. Apart from *Berlin*, made *Deutscher Rundfunk* (28) and *Arbeit macht frei* (33).

METHUEN FOR DRAMA

HAROLD PINTER

**Five
Screenplays**

The Servant
The Pumpkin Eater
The Quiller
Memorandum
Accident
The Go-Between

£3.75

Available from all good bookshops
and from French's Theatre Bookshop,
26 Southampton Street, Strand, London
WC2, from whom full lists of plays and
books on drama published by Methuen
may be obtained.

A British Film
Institute Education
Department
Publication

**VIOLENCE ON
THE SCREEN**

by André Glucksmann

An analysis of research
into the effects on
young people of scenes
of violence in films
and television

78 pp, 40p (47p inc postage)
Obtainable from:
B.F.I. Publications,
81 Dean Street
London W1V 6AA



EDUCATIONAL & TELEVISION FILMS Ltd

announce the publication of their

NEW 1971 DOCUMENTARY FILM CATALOGUE

details of over 900 16 mm titles on a wide range of subjects

SEND FOR IT TODAY — and for our new FEATURES LIST

EDUCATIONAL & TELEVISION FILMS Ltd

2 DOUGHTY STREET

LONDON

WC1N 2PJ

telephone: 01-405 0395/6

The Films of Douglas Sirk*

Fred Camper

introduction

Sirk is a film-maker whose films do not exist in some metaphysical space which removes them totally from applications to our experience, but who rather in certain respects makes very direct thematic statements about life, happiness, and human knowledge. No critic has been as perceptive as Sirk himself in articulating some of these themes, as in the interview in *Cahiers du Cinéma*. A useful introduction to Sirk might be in terms of these relatively concrete themes.

On the subject of happiness:

. . . everything, even life, is eventually taken away from you. You cannot feel, cannot touch the expression, you can only reach its reflections. If you try to grasp happiness itself, your fingers only meet a surface of glass, because happiness has no existence of its own, and probably exists only inside yourself. . . . I certainly believe that happiness exists, if only by the simple fact that it can be destroyed.¹

On blindness:

I have always been intrigued by the problems of blindness. One of my dearest projects was to make a film which took place in an asylum for the blind. It would only have people constantly groping, trying to grasp things they can't see.²

And on aesthetic distance:

I believe that art must establish distances, and I've been astonished in seeing my films again at the number of times I've used mirrors for they are the symbols of that distance.³

The idea of happiness runs through all of Sirk's films like the main theme of a fugue. It is perhaps most explicit in *There's Always Tomorrow*.

* Copyright Fred Camper 1971.

row. A familiar soap-opera plot has Clifford Groves, married and with three children, fall in love with Norma Miller, a woman who he knew when he was much younger, and who in fact had left town because of her undeclared love for him. He falls in love with her, and for a moment is ready to leave his family, telling her that the reality of their love is all that matters, but she answers by saying that the only reality is that of twenty years of Clifford Groves as a husband and father. Their love cannot be, she says; and so she is going back to New York.

Groves' life with his wife and children is shown as a constant series of interruptions. The privacy, the romance he would still like to have with his wife is rendered impossible by the continual intrusion of their children, who are almost as omnipresent as the surrealistically multiplying relatives who crowd the groom out of his own house in *No Room For The Groom*. As Groves himself says, he is 'dead', a 'walking talking robot'. In this context, his love for Norma develops not as a typical middle-aged promiscuity but as a symbol for the only possible escape, the only possible happiness, the only chance he has to find some real feeling in his life. This is part of the reason why Norma's rejection of the possibility is so devastating: she is consigning him to a living death whose nature he has for the first time realised, and for the first time attempted to escape from. An added irony is the fact that while his 'love' comes so suddenly that rather than love, it might be only an attempt to escape, a part of his 'search for youth', Norma's love is clearly real, and has endured within her over all these years — and yet it is she who rejects the possibility of its fruition.

Some of Groves' early scenes with Norma have a hypnotic unreality — a little like Ernst's scenes with Elizabeth in *A Time To Love And A Time To Die*. Both are depictions of a momentary happiness which cannot endure; Sirk says of one of the scenes in *A Time To Love*:

Things which endure may have a certain beauty in themselves, but they don't have that strange fascination which is only manifested at certain moments, like for example in that scene in which Gavin and Pulver realise that it is their duty to be happy since the world around them is falling apart. . . . True happiness never lasts.⁴

The latter statement is true of all Sirk's films. They set up the idea of happiness, and often appear to be showing it for a fleeting instant as a real possibility, but the passage of that instant reveals that the feeling can be perceived only in the form of the entire film, and that in this context it is clearly foredoomed.

It is quite characteristic of Sirk that the narrative forms of his films suggest that any happiness which appears to occur cannot last. The flashback in *Summer Storm* is admirably suited to this purpose. It opens in a drab publishing office; the girl Nadina seems trapped in a maze of wood-

and-glass partitions. As she begins to read Fedor's manuscript, describing his life with her and his other friends years ago, we flash back, and the manuscript's story constitutes the bulk of the film. The flashback begins with a shot intended to convey her early happiness with Fedor: the two of them are riding in a brightly lit, idyllic countryside with a rainbow in the background. We know that this happiness is foredoomed for we have seen Nadina as she is years later. But we know it for another, more important reason, one to be found within the shot itself. The countryside is rich, sensual, and like the shots of the pastry in the bakery window which follow, one almost feels its smell and touch. But in no sense is the countryside or anything else about the image 'real'. In fact, it is exactly the opposite; the shot seems to work against our traditional sense of perspective. The parts of the frame are never truly physically independent from one another. While there is a feel to the whole shot, we do not feel that the trees, for instance, have any reality as trees, or in terms of our conceptions of trees. They have no specific independent function or sign, either as symbols or as representatives of 'actual' trees; rather they are inextricably fused into the entire context of the shot. This is not an obvious point which is true of any film; many film images at least on the primary level allow objects to retain their identity as objects. The natural sights and sounds in Rossellini's *India*, for example, are felt first as natural things and only then in terms of their other meanings in the whole film. Sirk allows no such primary associations. To do so would be to permit the viewer to look at the shot and say, 'trees, a rainbow, happiness', and search for other meanings only insofar as they grow out of the reality of these primary ones. Rather, one looks at the image and says, 'trees, rainbow, supposed to be happiness . . . wait!' for in an instant these elements, in a shot with great apparent spatial depth, are seen as fused into a single surface which allows none of them any independent reality. Thus they suggest happiness not in a primary way but only in the context of that fusion: and so any happiness which they suggest is simultaneously realised to be unreal and impossible. The rainbow, which is supposed in 'nature' to lie in some distant place deep in the sky, looks almost like a painted backdrop. And thus the shot is not so much an expression of even an instant of happiness but rather of the impossibility of happiness. We can see only the 'surface of glass' of which Sirk speaks.

This description applies fairly well to all of Sirk's images. Objects and areas are never allowed to have the primary physical meaning which they have in real life. It is not that Sirk, as would any artist, transforms that primary meaning into something else, an expressive meaning, but rather that in terms of the films the objects can be seen only in terms of their expressive function in the shot. In this sense, the true subject of a Sirk film is not the situation of the film as used by Sirk, or the objects

in the frame as transformed by Sirk, but rather the actual subject is the expression of the film itself. More generally, Sirk's films can be said to be *about* aesthetic distances, *about* the mirror images and other reflections he uses so well.

If there is no worldly physical reality to any of the elements of his frames, then his characters can never be said to 'understand' or even see the real world. I am using the word real here in a very special way. Of course no formal art ultimately conveys or describes the everyday reality which we are accustomed to experiencing. In the films of Murnau — *Tabu*, for instance — one feels the ships and the sun and moon and ocean mainly as elements of Murnau's vision. But there is a constant sense of transformation. His use of the moon, or of the sea, recalls to our mind various associations we have with the real moon and the real sea. While he is describing the machinations of a cosmic kind of fatalism which is ultimately only of his own imagination, he roots that fatalism and its visual description in the physical world. Thus his films have a sense of reality insofar as they seem to be calling upon, and then transforming, real physical things. His images work in terms of this single transformation: that of the photographed object being transformed into an element of his vision. In a sense, it is this transformation, the arrival at his vision, that along with the vision itself is the deepest subject of his films. *Arrival* rather than vision arrived at, so our attention is fixed on his imaginative ordering and conversion of the things, the objects — ultimately, the light — which we have already come to know in everyday life. His films consequently have a certain feeling of total conclusiveness, a sense that the imaginative construction they effect is a kind of real truth or final reality, for the process by which that construction is reached from everyday objects is clearly shown. And so, since the active process of transformation rather than the passive state of an already-arrived-at vision is the subject of his films, we are permitted to view the things in the films both in their 'real' everyday sense, with the collective associations we bring to them (and which Murnau — and other filmmakers like him — used), and in their place in the film. This double association that objects retain makes their use as elements in the film all the more convincing: for it appears that the film's vision is built on some type of real, physical reality. By allowing us to see the transformation, by making it a part of the film, Murnau permits his art to retain some sense of primacy, some feeling that it is about one way of looking at the real world.

Sirk, on the other hand, works in exactly the opposite sense. It is the sense of a vision already arrived at, a transformation already effected, a surface which has already been reached that dominates his films. The objects in his films have a kind of fixity of meaning, and any additional

implications and resonances generally come not from associations with the objects themselves as much as from the more formal qualities of the image, which in turn assign the objects and people fixed positions in the frame. Happiness is something which in the deepest sense is never shown in Sirk, can never be shown, because the happiness he conceives of implies a kind of reality of experience which the very qualities of his images deny. His films are not about some physically real subject which is being transformed, but about the passive qualities of the images themselves. The complete unreality can be described as a kind of falseness, an anti-sensuality. The colours in *Written On The Wind* are far from realistic; rather they seem 'false' on any possible level. The red 'sunlight' on Kyle's face in the plane is neither psychologically symbolic nor realistic even on the level of imagination — as are, say, Minelli's colours — but rather seems to call attention to its own falseness. Paradoxically, it is this very falseness which holds the extraordinary expressive force that can make Sirk's films so powerful.

In a sense, then, all characters in Sirk are totally blind, surrounded as they are, not by real things but only by falseness. There is no question of seeing 'reality' on any level or attaining any genuine understanding since such concepts are completely excluded by the formal qualities of Sirk's images.

falseness

The notion of falseness, and of the characters' relationship to that falseness, is one that bears further exploring. 'False' is of course used here not to indicate a flaw, or that the film does not measure up to some arbitrary standard of realism, but rather to indicate the nature of a feeling that seems to be created within the context of the films themselves. In this regard, the question might well be asked 'false with respect to what?', because falseness is not a common emotion like fear which can be created alike in every member of an audience. To say that the look of a film feels false in terms of the film's own expression implies that the film itself suggests some other standard of reality. While Sirk can never show an experience more real than the primary feelings his films generate, he is able to use the films themselves to suggest that some reality higher than the films does in fact exist. It is important to understand that this suggestion is made entirely within the formal context of the films, rather than being imposed from without by some visual equivalent of an opening title 'the story you are about to see' or formal correlate of the dream-plot.

What Sirk does is to develop relationships in his films between characters and surrounding objects, between characters and their feelings, between object and object, which by their very nature are suggestive of

their own unreality or incompleteness. In Sirk's idea for a film about blind people, the audience would know that the characters were blind, and they themselves would know it, and so while the film would presumably develop the idea that a certain fullness of reality can never be experienced, we, as observers rather than participants in the blind person-to-object relationship, would know that the real object in fact existed, and that it was simply that the people could not see it. More importantly, the blind people themselves would be aware of their blindness, aware that they cannot see — ie fully understand and experience — the objects they are touching. This method of using one kind of seeing to suggest the existence of a reality far beyond it is no more of a paradox than suggested by writers on Earth who describe the Infinite, or God, or by the characters in Plato's cave learning of the existence of the sun. When Naomi Murdoch in *All I Desire* returns to her family, and stands outside on the lawn looking through the window at a presumably happy dinner table, the shots of the family seen through the window from her point of view are not meant to convey the reality of a happiness which she is outside of. Rather, the effect of her seeing them through the window conveys only the sense of *outsideness* itself. The family is reduced to shadows behind a pane of glass. There is no question of happiness in such a context. But what is important is the glass itself: 'for here is a concrete sign of the unreality of which I have been speaking. We *know* that the family is unreal to Naomi; she can only see their shadows, so to speak, and from a distance. We *see* the thing which is the concrete representation of that distance: the pane of glass, the frame of the window. It is by thus crystallising the unreality itself, by making that unreality, that frozen, static position, his subject, that Sirk makes us aware of it. His continual shooting of action reflected in mirrors is another example of this.

It is not only the pane of glass that makes us aware of the unreality, but the nature of the entire relationship between Naomi and her family. Even though invited inside her house, she remains emotionally an outsider for much of the film. Sirk makes systematic use of narrative situations which place an individual outside an action which he would like to be a part of. Sirk is then able to explore the relationship between, really the distance between, the character and the action. Particularly clear examples of this occur in *Has Anybody Seen My Gal* and *The Tarnished Angels*. Here are narrative representations of the impossibility of reaching, or merging with, idealised real experience. All that matters to Fulton in *Has Anybody Seen My Gal* is the family to which he cannot reveal himself; thus he is separated from the only thing he seems to care about. He must relate to them through the mask of the identity he has assumed. Again we have a relationship whose nature is made clear by the internal structure of the film.

In *The Lady Pays Off*, Diana, playing a young 'match-maker', arranges that her father eat dinner with Evelyn Warren. We see this dinner from Diana's position on a stairway above them. Sirk's assumption of her point of view here, like Naomi's in *All I Desire*, does not have the effect of making us identify with this character. In order to do so, it would be necessary for us to assume the character's point of view almost unconsciously, seeing what she sees as if it were a primary reality. Instead, Sirk in both situations constantly makes us aware that we are merely taking one possible point of view, the one that the character takes; further, that we are separated observers, not active participants, in the action. Our active knowledge of the point of view we are taking also keeps us aware of the possibility of other points of view, such as those of the characters we are watching, even if at the moment we are powerless to assume them. Separated by the pane of glass or the height of a stairway we view an action in which the characters whose place we occupy has a vital interest. But our conscious awareness of the distance makes us realise that the pane of glass, or the height, also separates *them* from *us*, and consequently reality or happiness is not to be found in the hoped-for ability to assume their positions; for then, looking at our former place from the other side of the real or metaphorical pane of glass, we would be just as separated from it, and from the rest of our surroundings. This is a crucial point in Sirk. There are many points of view that the camera, or a character, can take; but rather than contributing by simple addition to a total picture each remains separated from the others; and it is their very multiplicity that renders hopeless the possibility of real seeing. The more possible points of view there are, each equally valid but each inevitably separated, the more hopeless the situation appears, because the only thing that is increased is the multiplicity of possible separations.

It is thus that Sirk makes us aware of the unreality of everything that we, and his characters, see. He is able to use frames that are 'false' to make us aware of that very falseness, by setting up internal relationships such as those already described between different ways of seeing the same thing. As the viewer of character becomes aware of the distance and separation as a conscious element, so he also feels the implication that somewhere, in some other space, there is a physical reality. This is something which his characters also speak of and long for: for instance, Father Fulton in *The First Legion* with his desire to return to the 'real world out there'; or to the memories of his childhood. But no more real existence is ever shown in Sirk; this is precisely what he wishes to deny, and awareness of it occurs only to the extent that it is needed as a reference back to the flatness of the frames.

Flatness is perhaps a better word than unreality or falseness, both of which have negative connotations which should be avoided, and it also

suggests another method by which Sirk creates his style. On the deepest expressive level, his frames never possess anything remotely resembling three-dimensional perspective, but rather they all operate in a kind of pre-Renaissance flatness. This is true even of the shots which would appear to the casual viewer to possess spatial depth, such as the deep-focus shots taken inside the houses in *Take Me To Town* or *There's Always Tomorrow*. The camera, in wide angle, shows a deep and apparently 'realistic', room. But simultaneous with this perception we feel that the back of the room, the background, seems to have as much force, power, or presence as the foreground. The shot often places the foreground objects to the sides of the frame, leaving large spaces at the centre for the background. This background seems to impinge, come forward, make itself felt with a rare and mysterious force. Finally, we feel that all the parts of the frame are fused into a single level of depth, a single surface. This can be said to apply to all of Sirk's shots; it is more obviously true of a film like *Written On The Wind*, which specifically works with colours and flat textures.

Ultimately this works toward the same end as the internalised relationships and endistancing effects. What do we mean by physical reality, sensual presence, if not a kind of three-dimensional full-bloodedness which Sirk's frames would so obviously exclude? His characters, all living things, are forced into a kind of living death, or life only as shadows. Indeed, the world of a Sirk film is not unlike a Platonic shadow-play.

One might read the foregoing and wonder what the purpose of a Sirk film is at all, when a 'higher' reality is available to our everyday senses. This would be to misunderstand the relationship between life and art. The whole point of Sirk is not to lead us to some more physical experiencing of things, but to show us the beauty of his anti-physical, two dimensional perspective. The references to some unseen higher existence in his films only serve to lead us back to the film's own world; to add that much more force to the crystallisation of his vision. Ultimately, as an artist, Sirk does not deal in despair but in aesthetic beauty.

two-dimensionality

The flatness of Sirk is not one of complete equality or balance. Indeed, one of the things that gives his films so much force is the individual power that can be imparted to specific objects and events. At times, this seems to take on an almost causal form, as if certain events occurring within this flatness were in fact the cause of that flatness. One example can be found in *Shockproof*, in the scene in the oil-camp. Griff and Jenny, the hunted lovers, live in a hut whose 'walls' are of wire mesh; trying to hide their faces to avoid discovery, they are in constant view of

their prying neighbours. Sirk makes the neighbours particularly crude; their constant presence in the frame seems to render impossible and even ridiculous the tenderness of Griff and Jenny's love. The images themselves, with Griff and Jenny in the foreground and the characters seen through wire screen in the background, have the effect of making the other couple seem intrusive, ever-present. One might think that the screen, the separation, would keep them apart. On one level it does; it prevents any real physical contact or full-blooded relationship. But it also reduces the other couple to more nameless, terrifying presences; visible through the screen, they become it; fusing into the surface with Griff and Jenny, their presence there has a kind of perverse, nameless voyeurism which actually mocks their desire to be alone.

The use of individual objects or characters to similar ends occurs throughout Sirk. Mirror shots are the most common example. The mirror image clearly exists on a different physical level from that of the characters, and is hence separated. But — in the scene between Annie and Sarah Jane in her dressing room toward the end of *Imitation Of Life* — the presence of both the reflection and the character in the same frame tends to unite them into a single surface. Ultimately, the presence of the reflection and its fusion with the character reduces the character herself to the status of a mere reflection, just as the presence of the other couple in *Shockproof* debased and mocked the idea of any feeling between Jenny and Griff. More generally, the presence of a reflection merely in the same context or sequence, as in the pan to Fedor's mirror image in the restaurant in *Summer Storm*, has the same effect. In fact, just as we have described all Sirk's frames as shadow-plays, so we might just as well describe them as mirror images or reflections.

I have not made clear enough the chilling, starkly terrifying effect that many of these images can have. When Helen, thinking she is alone in a room in Toni's house in *Interlude*, first sees the reflection of his wife in the piano cover, the shot of that reflection has a kind of ghost-like presence which devastates any sense of security that the passive staticism of Sirk's style might have led us to feel. The appearance of the evil doctor in a room in Allison's house in *Sleep, My Love* has a similar unsettling effect. While these objects ultimately work towards keeping the other characters frozen into the surface, their apparent emergence from that surface in order to effect this is precisely what is so striking. Sirk's staticism is not a passively postulated style but one which is crystallised actively and with considerable force.

Related to the terrifying events is the more general power which can be imparted to objects in Sirk. This has been explored in more detail elsewhere with respect to *The First Legion*,⁵ and I will return to it in discussing *The Tarnished Angels*. The main point is that quite often objects

which have no apparent symbolic meaning can take on force within the frame similar to that of Mrs Fischer's piano-reflection. They have a similar effect; partially emerged from the staticism, they help return all other things to it, and are ultimately themselves a part of it. In fact, the shot of Mrs Fischer is itself a reflection; it can be said to 'emerge from staticism' only insofar as it upsets the kind of complacent balance which the film's style might have led one to feel up to this point.

The unusual force that can be attained by a Sirkian reflection or object implies that his frames are not balanced with any kind of equality. It could not be said that each part of the frame is the equal of every other. The same is true of Sirk's use of the narrative structure as a whole.

narrative

Sirk has stated that he realised after making *A Scandal In Paris* that American audiences were not receptive to 'nuances that have a double meaning and make us smile'. The implication is that soon after coming to America, he found it necessary to tone down his tendency toward this type of irony. Indeed, a German film like *Zu Neuen Ufern* or one of his first American films, *Summer Storm*, has a density of occurrences, a rich level of ironies, which form a good deal of the basis for the film's structure. By contrast, *All That Heaven Allows* or *Magnificent Obsession* would appear to be far less dense and intense. But beyond these superficial details one can find a similarity in the use of narrative form among all four films, one which reflects on Sirk's style and method as a whole.

Many films, for instance those of Hawks, build their effect through a cumulative process of addition of scenes. The narrative line of the film does not have a classic or fatalist determined form, but rather progresses with a kind of natural, improvised rhythm. Each scene builds on the previous one, so that the film is no more than the sum of all the scenes seen in order. No single scene either dominates the film or gives the feeling of having determined any part of its action larger than the relative length of the scene in the film. All the scenes exist in a kind of equal balance. Sirk's narrative structures are the exact opposite of this. No scene can be viewed in isolation from the whole. The sections do not combine by addition, but like pieces of a puzzle — the overall narrative form of the film — whose total picture has been determined in advance. The order in which the pieces are put together — the order of the film's scenes — is not of paramount importance. But each scene is meaningless without referring to the whole — both the scenes that preceded it and the scenes to follow. Most important, each piece of the puzzle, each scene, is not necessarily of equal importance. Indeed, some scenes can be so crucial as to exert a determining effect on the meaning of the surrounding scenes. It is only in the most general visual sense that an

individual shot or sequence in Sirk may be said to contain all his meanings. Insofar as the meaning of the individual incidents and of the story as a whole is concerned, single events, even single objects, can exert a pivotal influence.

A good example occurs in *All That Heaven Allows*. The film is full of flat surface textures and bright 'false' colours. Like many of Sirk's films, it seems to largely forsake the power of individual objects for the simpler beauty of surfaces, areas of colour and texture. While this type of style has transcendent complexity in a film like *A Time To Love And A Time To Die*, in *All That Heaven Allows* one imagines it might simply be Sirk's response to the relatively simple story that was assigned to him. The plot concerns a middle-aged widow who would like to find happiness with her gardener, Ron Kirby, but whose friends try to force her into a more conventional pattern which involves marrying a smooth sweet 'respected citizen' older, rather than younger, than herself. Things seem to progress along fairly predictable lines, and while watching the film we may guess that it will be relatively sparse in ironies or object-power, and is perhaps more a question of Sirk responding to his material rather than a total expressive integration of form and content. This misconception might lead us to see the film as a relatively impersonal project filmed by Sirk with his characteristic eye for beautiful colours and surfaces.

Midway through the film, the widow's son comes home from Princeton University for Christmas. Her son and daughter have raised particularly strong objections to her interest in her gardener. Earlier, someone had suggested to her that, as a widow, she should get something 'suitable' to occupy her time — like a television. Now, a man wheels in her Christmas present from her children — a TV. He unwraps it and holds it before her, and the camera dollies in on the TV screen itself, in which her face can be seen reflected as she gazes at it, ghost-like, isolated, alone, as he says that in this box she can find 'drama . . . comedy . . . life's parade at your fingertips'. In an instant, in one of the most chilling moments in any film, we have a complete representation of the movement of the film as a whole, the attempt of the other characters to reduce the apparently more real feelings she has for Ron Kirby to 'drama . . . comedy . . . life's parade at your fingertips'.

The film, taken as a whole, can almost be said to pivot around this single shot. The expressive force of every image, the meaning of every surface, is to some extent informed by its presence and implications.

Similarly, *Magnificent Obsession* pivots to some extent around a single shot. Randolph throughout the film gives his religious philosophy, about how you can accomplish almost anything if you are in touch with the 'source of infinite power'. This phrase has a special irony for Sirk, since

on the one hand everything is trapped and there are no sources of power strong enough to transcend the surface, while on the other the objects that partially emerge from that surface do seem to have a power which is almost limitless — limitless, at least, in terms of being able to exert causal influence on the world of the film. The shooting is somewhat like that of *All That Heaven Allows*, although there is more contrast in the frames and the surfaces are not as smooth. At the end of the film, Bob Merrick is about to perform an operation on the woman he loves, with very slim chances of success. Even if he can save her life, she will remain hopelessly blind. He doesn't want to perform it, saying that he is not qualified and it will not succeed. Randolph urges him to. In the operating room, he hesitates before beginning, and then sees Randolph's face, standing and watching from outside, reflected in a mirror above his head. This has enormous causal force, partly as another powerful reflection and because of Randolph's claim to represent the 'source of infinite power'. In the context of the film, it is this shot of his reflection that is the true source of infinite power: it is what causes Merrick to operate, the woman to live and miraculously see again, an apparently impossible conclusion which is a tribute to the power of reflections over all logic much as the end of *The First Legion* imparts a similar power to objects. Finally, the entire religious philosophy of the script has meaning only in the context of that one shot of Randolph: it seems to sum up the entire mechanism of the film, and yet it is also a reflection.

On the other hand, a film like *Zu Neuen Ufern* is extremely rich in similarly ironic events. Because of their multiplicity, the film does not pivot around any one of them, but has rather many points which serve almost as signposts or references for the movement and meaning of the rest of the film. The characteristic form in both cases is one of a story filmed with a general style which is its deepest meaning, but containing specific shots or events or objects which seem to be concrete — even verbally representable — crystallisations of the meanings of that style. Sirk uses the narrative not as an excuse for scenes, or for the creation of some other form, but as a pre-determined pattern which imposes itself like a matrix over the entire film. As the film progresses, events crystallise the meaning of that pattern, to the point where the thrust of the earlier scenes is often clearest only after the film has ended.

The mocking nature of many of these crystallising events should be clear. Sirk's films are full of bitter, mocking ironies, which is perhaps what Sarris meant when he spoke of Sirk's 'dark humour'.⁶ One of the earliest examples occurs in *Zu Neuen Ufern*. Gloria Vane is in love with Sir Albert, and goes to prison for him; getting out, she finds him engaged to another; broken-hearted, she takes a job singing in a sleazy casino. Sir Albert comes in; she spots him while she is singing, breaks

down and cannot continue. Here is an instance of real feeling appearing to break through: but it forces her off the stage and ultimately out of the frame. Immediately following her break-down, a dancing girl comes out in a ridiculous clown-like costume and struts up and down on the stage, mocking and ultimately reducing any feeling Gloria might have had. This absurd clowning is what the world requires of her, not any real feeling, or even singing which reflects such feeling; the casino audience regards this as false, and the clown-girl as 'real' entertainment. The entire context of the film excludes such feeling; the clown girl is Sirk's comment on people who think they have attained it.

In many of his other films, Sirk chooses to make his last shot not one of the characters but rather some animal or object which seems to comment absurdly on the characters' plight. The stuffed fish at the end of *No Room For The Groom* emphasises the static nature of animals, and ultimately of the characters. The monkey at the end of *A Scandal In Paris*, on the other hand, appears animate, but uses its motion simply to mock or mimic the earlier motions of the people. Perhaps the greatest 'mocking' ending is that of *Summer Storm*. The flashback has ended, the cold present returned; despite Nadina's hope, all chance of love between her and Fedor has passed. Trying to get back his manuscript, Fedor is shot; before falling, he drops a dance card which he had given Nadina years ago, on which he had written 'I love you'. The last shots show the trash being swept off the floor; the dance card is dropped into the waste basket, open and with the words 'I love you' plainly visible, and another heap of soot is dumped on top of it and the words. Such is the reduction of the film: real love to the written word, and the words then to just another surface layer in the layers of garbage in the trash basket.

The relationship between the individual and the object which is mocking him has similarities to the relationship between individuals and things they are looking at as described in *All I Desire* and *The Lady Pays Off*. The mirror reflection or other mocking object is no more (or less) real than the characters' actual state. In *Written On The Wind*, Kyle speaks to a doctor who implies that he might be sterile, which brings out his neurotic fears of impotence. He leaves the drugstore where they talk, a broken man, to be suddenly confronted with a little boy bouncing up and down on a wooden horse. The hideous grotesqueness of this image, the unashamed physicality of the child appearing to remind Kyle even more of his own state, is indescribable. But the image of the boy does not reveal some hidden truth of which we were not aware; it does not serve to delineate Kyle's character any more clearly. In terms of the factual structure of the character and the story it is thoroughly superfluous: and this is precisely the point. It is its apparent gratuitousness,

coming after Kyle has already been told in effect that his sperm count is low, that makes the shot so powerful: it is like an exaggerated reflection of Kyle's own view of himself, coming at him with an illogically sadistic force merely for the purpose of being there, of mocking him. Sirk's art is constructed out of such reflections; rather than being superfluous, they are the very substance of his films.

Consequently, the animals, or the end of *Summer Storm*, which do in a sense represent an absurd view of existence, should not be taken as prime examples of mocking relationships in Sirk. Such relationships have their greatest meaning and impact to the degree that the 'mocking' image appears to be simply another view or reflection of the object mocked. Sirk's mirror images gain some of their power from the inexplicable feeling that one's own reflection holds — or reveals — another side of oneself, terrible truths one wishes to avoid — the ultimate truth that a mirror can reveal that oneself, everything, is only a reflection. But before reaching this stage of frozen feelings, Sirk's reflections can have unlimited and terrifying suggestive powers. All his other 'mockeries' have similar effects — they appear to be only mirror images, other versions or perceptions, of things within the central objects or characters. This process reaches a complexity so great that one can almost say that all the objects in Sirk are only masks or reflections cast of all the other objects.

The use of reflections or mockery is never meant to convey a sense of complete surrealist or absurd disconnection. Rather than being strictly absurd, the last shot of *Summer Storm* gains much of its power from being such a devastatingly clear representation of the process of the entire film. The mocking object is not something stuck in the film by Sirk to give it a sense of ridiculousness, but rather is in fact the *same thing* as the object mocked. If it seems absurd this is only to make clear to us the absurdity of our normal view — that the primary objects we see — as, the characters' bodies in *A Scandal In Paris* — are in some sense the 'real thing'. The use of a monkey as a character finally conveys the feeling that the characters were similarly ridiculous throughout the film — and that both monkeys and people are only two-dimensional reflections of a presumed three-dimensional world outside of our vision and beyond the frames. The characters and the monkey are two poles of the same class of objects — as, red and cyan may be opposites, but they are both colours — which relate to each other as does Kyle to the boy on the toy horse in *Written On The Wind*. The initial appearance of one as the falsification of the other gives way to a perception — forced on us by the unity of Sirk's surfaces — of both as falsifications, falsifications only in the sense that one might use the endlessly recurring reflections to infer by their recurrence the existence of some other world. Such a world

is outside Sirk's vision and not otherwise relevant to his films. Reflections and mockeries are like the relationships between 'outsiders' and the worlds they idealise. The frame places all things in a single context which makes separate objects all seem reflections of each other.

This is the final and clearest meaning I can describe in Sirk. The sense of frames as unified wholes, containing separate areas, pieces of the puzzle, which draw meaning only from the total picture gives way to a sense of the interdependence of every object coming from the fact that ultimately all the objects are views of the same thing. Not that they have all emerged from some primary object or shape, a sense that some of Brakhage's films give, but rather that they are all views of some general space which by its very nature is two-dimensional. As one can say that while red and cyan are opposites they are both colours, and that while reflections of different objects in a mirror are all reflections, so Sirk's objects are limited to their own class or state of being. As Sirk's films are 'about themselves', one finally has a feeling that his real meaning is in the actual style or general space or state of being of which all his objects are a part. The difference between different objects is finally only a localised one, simply a specific materialisation, one possible way of seeing, the general space. Beyond this general beauty the interest in Sirk comes from the wonderfully imaginative multiplicity of different materialisations in his films.

In a sense, then, any general truth that can be found in Sirk has relevance to the entire film in which it occurs and to all his work. The pivotal events have special relevance because, invested with special power, they ultimately seem to be closer, or stronger, materialisations. Every general intellectual point that we can make about Sirk, every category into which we can place his events, is ultimately equally true of every event in his films. Kyle's impotence in *Written On The Wind* may be a metaphor for the film's entire state, and impotence is a theme, like blindness, which recurs explicitly in several Sirk films. But like blindness, it has its greatest meaning when understood as a metaphor for all of Sirk's *oeuvre*, for the state of every character. The flatness of all Sirk's frames, their lack of flesh-and-blood physicality, would seem to be a description of such impotence. The only objects which have force in Sirk are completely asensual, like the mysteriously powerful objects which ultimately exact a kind of vengeance in *The First Legion*, or the more direct and voyeurist couple in the adjoining cabin in the oil-camp in *Shockproof*. In this context, the unnaturally red sunlight on Kyle's face in *Written On The Wind* can be seen as another metaphor for his impotence: the colour is as rich as any in the film, but by its falseness conveys the sense that the greatest possible richness is ultimately asensual. By making us directly aware of its falseness, it calls attention to it.

self, away from Kyle, rendering him even more distant and powerless.

In discussing impotence, Sirk has said ' . . . if you think too much about the sexual act you lose your sexual power '.⁸ In a sense, this statement holds a key to the nature and cause of the theme of impotence in Sirk. His films do not show primary physical reality but objects filtered through enddistancing perception, a constructed reality whose only subject finally is itself. This kind of endless self-reflection can be seen to lead to falseness — if all one's thoughts derive from self-contemplation, they form a kind of endless loop of reflections which cannot be real — and the ' thinking too much ' that causes this is a kind of generalisation of Sirk's remark ' thinking too much about the sexual act '. Thinking too much on something finally transforms one's attention from the thing itself — an object or a sexual act — to one's own thoughts *about* that thing. This is the deepest implication of the red sunlight in the plane cockpit in *Written On The Wind*. Its unreality seems its own subject in such a final way as to exclude any other kind of reality. This creates the feeling of Kyle being trapped in this grotesqueness of self-contemplation and mockery; a feeling of total powerlessness, of despair.

One should never mistake such despair for a hopelessness without beauty. This is made clearest by the end of *Imitation Of Life*. Sarah Jane breaks into her mother's funeral procession. Having rejected her mother and her values through the years, and broken her mother's heart, she now, and too late, is sorry. She breaks open the hearse, screaming, ' Mama, I did love you ', and clutches at the coffin. But the coffin is covered with a huge bouquet of flowers, and she can reach only at those flowers. Once again, trying to find real feeling, one reaches only surfaces.

But the funeral procession of *Imitation Of Life* is one of the most transcendently beautiful sequences of any film. Its despair is transcended by the very beauty of the surfaces which the sequence itself celebrates. While certain kinds of real feeling are excluded, the flowers, the shots of the procession through frosted glass, the final high shot, have the beauty of a kind of triumph — the triumph of surfaces over reality perhaps, but just as well, the triumph of art over life. If Sirk's films are about their own style, then this sequence is ultimately celebrating its own beauty. But Sirk seems to have gone beyond the almost impotent flatness of some of his earlier films to a kind of sensual celebration of the very flowers, the colours, that had previously had mocking connotations. When Sarah Jane clutches at the flowers, she has reached the only kind of beauty that is possible to man in Sirk's films — and her blindness is not in her earlier refusal to recognise the reality of her mother's love, but rather in her refusal now to recognise — as do the other characters — the beauty of those surfaces.

melodrama

Perhaps one of the reasons why Sirk has not attained any great degree of 'serious' recognition is that so many of his films were made in the genre of the soap-opera, which is probably the type of film most reviled by anti-film intellectuals and aesthetes. To be sure, there are valid objections that can be made to soap-operas, at least on social grounds. To paraphrase Polonsky's very perceptive remarks about popular fiction, the soap-opera is generally based on a series of 'if onlys'. 'If only I was twenty years younger'; 'if only his phone hadn't been engaged then'; 'if only he had known about the baby'. These correspond to a series of invented choices which, were they made at some time in the past, would have made everything fine in the present: 'then I would have married her', 'then she wouldn't have committed suicide', 'then he would have taken care of her'. This entire process is a kind of false, cheating romanticism which sets up situations which in fact never existed, which seeks to attribute all our present troubles to an unfortunate past mistake or chance occurrence. The romanticism comes from the attempt to play on the viewer's fantasies, allowing him to rewrite the past without reference to human failings in order to fantasise about a wished-for present that in fact can never be. It is a cheap kind of manipulation of audience wishes; Polonsky is quite correct when he calls it 'the pornography of feeling'.⁹

The very first set of these 'if onlys' and invented choices is in fact, along with another 'if only she had told me that she loved me', the basis of Sirk's *There's Always Tomorrow*. But here Sirk parts company with romanticism, real or false; here the resemblance ends. For to understand the film on all its levels is to know that no true happiness is ever possible. Every frame's tight static unity specifically excludes any romantic imaginings outside of the context of the film. And the final meaning of the script itself is precisely that you can never go back; that any such feelings (about the possibility of real love) that might exist are entirely outside of the context of the film, and thus, outside of the context of what is allowed to the characters.

I bring this up not to answer a possible objection to Sirk but to re-state the unity of all the different elements in his films. Everything in the frame crystallises into an unbreakable whole which suggests nothing but itself. A Murnau or a Rossellini frame suggests that it is only a part of some half-unseen larger order, which in Murnau represents a kind of unfathomable fate. But if Murnau's fate is unfathomable because it is unseen, Sirk's fatalism and sense of despair is inexplicable precisely because it is so clearly visible, visible on the same level of expression as the other elements of the film. This is to say, there are no successively deeper levels of meaning suggested by a Sirk film. The meaning of his

frames reflects back only on themselves, which is to repeat that Sirk's films are about their own style. Every element in a Sirk film is on some level a reflection or mockery only of some other element of that same film. The revelations — the moments which seem to take on special power — lead us only to more reflections of those revelations, until we realise that the only real revelation is that everything is a reflection.

Thus Sirk's films are remarkably unified and self-contained. One could almost take the succession of points I have already made, and construct a giant chart with arrows connecting each aspect of Sirk to every other to show that they are all inter-related. Object power creates flatness of surface; flatness of surface allows objects properly placed amidst the flatness to attain power; mockeries are reflections of the only possible reality in Sirk; the greatest knowledge possible to a Sirk character is the awareness of his own blindness. This is why it is generally those characters that attempt to reach out beyond the blindness, attempt to see, or actually believe that they can see, that are the ones that are doomed. A list of the characters killed or otherwise devastated in Sirk's films reads like a list of all the characters who attempted to reach some real understanding and control of their surroundings; who thought they had such understanding; who tried to use it to find happiness. From *Summer Storm* to *Imitation Of Life* this pattern is repeated, the exceptions invariably being the relatively unconvincing 'happy' endings of *All I Desire* or *All That Heaven Allows*, or the clearly ambiguous ones like *Magnificent Obsession*.

One qualification should be made to the notion that all events in Sirk are self-contained. It is true that they do not actively create meanings or further ideas outside of the context of the film. But the most powerful events occur with a kind of irrational or at least inexplicable power, and are placed in a position which is strictly speaking illogical but whose very surprise helps to generate that power. In most of the films, the impossibility of understanding seems entirely attributable to the surfaces of the frames themselves. But there are a few — *The First Legion*, *The Tarnished Angels*, *A Time To Love And A Time To Die* — which also seem haunted by a kind of unseen fatalism or foredooming, not unlike the feeling of hopelessness created by the flashback form of *Summer Storm*. To an extent this feeling is attributable to the narrative forms that these films take. But as is made clear by *A Time To Love And A Time To Die* there are instances where an irrational power seems to strike at the characters almost as if from outside the context of the film. This power never materialises in any sense, nor are its properties even hinted at as they are in Murnau. It is not so much something unseen as it is something which is beyond seeing. This sense of fate occurs to a smaller degree in all of Sirk's films, though it is generally difficult

to separate it from the more internal causes. But finally it seems to me to be the opposite correlate of the equally-unseeable sense of 'reality' or 'happiness' in Sirk; fate is the negative side of this, a kind of unspeakably sadistic evil.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No 189, April 1967, 'Entretien avec Douglas Sirk', p 70.
2. *ibid*, p 23.
3. *ibid*, p 70.
4. *ibid*, p 70.
5. See article by Dave Grosz in this issue, p 99.
6. *The American Cinema*, Andrew Sarris, Dutton Paperbacks (New York), 1968.
7. *Object* is used throughout to connote not simply an inanimate object or 'thing' but every separate area in a Sirk frame—an inanimate object, a person, an animal, or even an area of texture. It is in this general sense that I now speak of Sirk's whole world as consisting of objects.
8. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, *ibid*, p 69.
9. *The Director's Event*, ed Eric Sherman and Martin Rubin, Atheneum (New York), 1969.

Distanciation and Douglas Sirk

Paul Willemen

The imitation of nature is a means but not an end in art. Theatre that simply aims at accurate rendering of reality is meant for people with little imagination. Art is inevitably determined by a set of conditions and patterns.

Valery Bryusov

I would have made Imitation of Life anyway, for the title alone. There is a marvellous saying in English, which I think expresses the essence of art, or at least, of its language, 'seeing through a glass darkly'.

Douglas Sirk

This radically different interpretation of the word 'imitation' given by Bryusov and Sirk pinpoints quite clearly the main question raised by Sirk's films: how should art relate to reality? Bryusov's statement, appearing in the fourth issue of *The World of Art* (1906), the Russian symbolist magazine, has to be placed in the context of the symbolist reaction against naturalism. In this article, Bryusov attacks the Moscow Art Theatre for the 'unnecessary faithfulness to life' of its productions. Such efforts to imitate 'reality' on the stage had been the most dominant characteristic of the bourgeois theatre between c 1750 and 1910. This type of theatre, described by Siegfried Melchinger as 'illusionist',¹ constituted an attempt to create the illusion that the events which were taking place on the stage were, in fact, 'real', and the intention was to make the spectator forget that he was watching a performance in the theatre.

The cinematic equivalent to illusionism can be found in the theories of André Bazin, where the cinema is viewed as a means of duplicating or reproducing reality. When Bazin applies this bias to filmed plays, he came to the logical conclusion that film had to reproduce the theatrical experience by explicitly emphasising the stage conventions, stressing the point that the essence of theatre is the representation of a literary text. As this text has been specifically designed to function within the four walls of the stage (the three physical walls together with the footlights), Bazin argues that the filmed play has to recreate this theatrical echo-chamber, or else the text has to be drastically altered in order to adapt it to the new, open situation of the cinema. Bazin's model for the ideal theatrical film is *Henry V* because Olivier successfully succeeded in depicting the 'reality' of a theatrical performance, making use of the

camera simply as a recording instrument. Here we are faced with a kind of second degree realism, a faithful reproduction of a stylised event. Bazin's concept of a theatrical film is, in fact, a documentary of a stage-play; such a theory is useless when discussing any genuine influence the theatre might have had on the cinema, or indeed, for discussing theatrical influences detectable in Sirk's work.

On reading Sirk's essays and interviews, it is possible to deduce that Sirk is familiar with all the major theories of representation formulated in the first two decades of the century in Russia and Germany. Although Sirk's aesthetic position can in no way be confused with either expressionism or symbolism, it is quite evident that he shares the complete rejection of the conventions of illusionism which characterises these movements. Without fully subscribing to any single movement, Sirk was undoubtedly greatly influenced by the theatrical revolution which immediately preceded his career as a stage director. When analysing his American films it becomes apparent that many stylistic features which had been rehabilitated by expressionism together with the symbolist concept of *correspondances* were adapted by Sirk to suit his own purposes. In his American melodramas in particular, it is possible to discern the echoes of such expressionist prescriptions as:

'The melody of a great gesture says more than the highest consummation of what is called naturalness.' (Paul Kornfeld)

'The dullness and stupidity of men are so enormous that only enormities can counteract them. Let the new drama be enormous.' (Yvan Goll)

'Man and things will be shown as naked as possible, and always through a magnifying glass for better effect.' (Yvan Goll)

However, for Sirk, such prescriptions represent a source of inspiration and become no more than echoes, detectable in his magnification of emotionality, his use of pathos, choreography and music, reverberating within the mirror-ridden walls of a Sirkian decor. The meaning of this kind of stylisation does not become clear on the first viewing of a Sirk film. In order to grasp its full significance it is necessary to take into account the circumstances under which Sirk was required to work — the big Hollywood studio. Subject matter as well as general narrative outline were imposed upon him, as was the necessity of pleasing a very large audience for the maximum possible profits. This meant that he had to make films for the 'average American' audience, of which Sirk has said, 'Irony doesn't go down well with the American public. This is not meant as a reproach, but merely that in general this public is too simple and too naïve — in the best sense of these terms — to be susceptible to irony. It requires clearly delineated positions, for and against'.

As a European left-wing intellectual, Sirk, surprisingly enough, found

these new circumstances very stimulating, and he wholeheartedly embraced the rules of the American genres, especially those of the melodrama. He drew on his theatrical experience not to break the rules of these genres, but to intensify them. This intensification is brought about in a number of ways:

- (i) by the deliberate use of symbols as emotional stimuli, the most striking feature of these symbols being their total unequivocalness (eg the association of Kirby in *All That Heaven Allows* with a Christmas tree and a deer; Sarah Jane's mud-stained white dress in *Imitation of Life*);
- (ii) by setting the action in an echo-chamber reminiscent of a stage (eg *Imitation of Life* is made almost entirely in long shot, which emphasises both the spaciousness and the confinement of the decor);
- (iii) through the use of choreography as a direct expression of character (eg Sarah Jane's dance in *Imitation of Life* and Mary Lee's dance in *Written on the Wind*);
- (iv) through the use of baroque colour-schemes (eg in *Written on the Wind*).

The subject matter of these melodramas differs in no way from run-of-the-mill products; in fact, Sirk made quite a lot of re-makes. However, by stylising his treatment of a given narrative, he succeeded in introducing in a quite unique manner, a distance between the film and its narrative pretext. The most striking example of this 'through a glass darkly' technique can be found in the credit sequence of *Imitation of Life*. As the titles begin to appear on the screen, a large number of 'glass' diamonds slowly drift down across the screen, as if poured by an invisible hand, until they finally fill the screen by the time the director's credit appears. In an interview he gave to *Cahiers du Cinema*,² Sirk explains in some detail the importance he attaches to stylisation, and stresses the importance he attaches to establishing a distance between the audience and the depicted action. However, such statements can be misleading. In general in his melodramas Sirk does not employ techniques to distanciate his audience. On the contrary, he mercilessly implicates the audience in the action. (Ample proof of this can be found in the audience's near hysterical reactions to his films involving abundant tears and/or self-protective laughter.) Such reactions seem to indicate that the distance Sirk is referring to is not necessarily perceived by the audience. However, this does not mean that distance does not exist within the film itself; merely that there appears to be a discrepancy between the audience Sirk is aiming at and the audience which he knows will come to see his films. We can even assume that Sirk is well aware of this discrepancy; in fact, in some of his films he takes great care to ensure that the audience does experience a sense of distanciation, for instance, by making

use of an epilogue in *Tarnished Angels*. In such cases as these where, in general, he had more directorial control, the techniques he employs differ in kind from those he employs in the melodramas.

When we compare Sirk's films with other melodramas, such as the films of Frank Borzage, Leo McCarey and Vincente Minnelli, it becomes evident that Sirk's rhetoric does not refer to the idealist dichotomy of reality/fantasy which characterises their work. Instead Sirk informs the surface reality of the plot and characterisation with a secondary reality. This reality can consist of:

- (i) a different story, as is the case with *Sign of the Pagan*, where Sirk grafted undercurrents of *Tamburlaine* on to the main narrative;
- (ii) a criticism of the surface reality (*Written on the Wind*, *All I Desire*, *Imitation of Life*) which Sirk achieves by relying on techniques of stylisation which refer the viewer to aesthetic concepts developed in the theatre (eg intensification of the rules of the genre) which result in a totally anti-illusionist mode of representation.

Yuri Tynyanov³ in a study of Dostoyevsky and Gogol points out that stylisation and parody are, in fact, closely linked to each other: 'Both live a double life: beyond the work, there is a second level, stylised or prosodised. When stylisation is strongly marked, it becomes parody.' To avoid any confusion, it must be stated that the term 'parody' as used by Tynyanov, does not necessarily imply 'comic'.⁴ He defines parody as 'the mechanisation of a particular procedure, a mechanisation which, of course, will only be noticeable where the procedure to which it is applied is known. Hence, if the parody's style is not sufficiently familiar to the audience, they will be unaware that something is being parodied.' Although the notion of parody cannot be applied to the entire *oeuvre* of Sirk, some of the films have strong parodic elements in them. This becomes most evident in Sirk's use of *cliché*. What was referred to earlier as the deliberate use of symbols for emotional effect could, in Sirk's case, also be read as the deliberate use of *cliché*. Sirk's melodramas abound with cliché-images⁵ (eg a deer and a Christmas tree are symbols for nature; a mink coat stands for success; a red-lit cabaret stands for depravity; a red dress and fast cars stand for irresponsibility and loose-living). Here we are confronted with a deliberate and systematic use (ie a mechanisation) of a stylistic procedure which characterises the stories in women's weeklies. It is extremely difficult to make any clearcut and precise distinction between stylisation and parody, but Tynyanov's remark about Dostoyevsky could easily be applied to Sirk: 'It may very well be that this delicate interweaving of stylisation and parody, covering the development of a tragic subject, constitutes the originality of the sense of the grotesque in Dostoyevsky.'

From these somewhat brief observations, we can conclude that Sirk

makes his films on two levels by superimposing on to the cinematic mode of representation (ie the duplication of the pre-filmic world) a rhetoric informed by the theatrical concepts and theories developed at the beginning of this century in Russia and Germany. This second level constitutes an extra link in the usual chain of representation (whether it is perceived by the audience or not), producing a distanciation effect originating in the first place in a distance between the director and the action. This level, produced through stylisation, can also be used to parody the stylistic procedures which traditionally convey an extremely smug, self-righteous and *petit bourgeois* world view paramount in the American melodrama. If we apply the categories outlined by J-L. Comolli and J. Narboni in their editorial in *Cahiers*,⁶ we would have to place Sirk's films in category E: 'films which seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideology and to be completely under its sway, but which turn out to be so in an ambiguous manner'.⁷ As Roland Barthes pointed out, a rhetoric functions as the signifier of an ideology;⁸ and by altering the rhetoric of the bourgeois melodrama, through stylisation and parody, Sirk's films distanciate themselves from the bourgeois ideology.

In order to discover what ideology Sirk's films do convey, it might be fruitful to examine the relationship between Sirk's work and the authors whose influence he admits to, such as the seventeenth century Spanish dramatists. The similarities between the work of Pedro Calderon de la Barca and that of Sirk⁹ offer valuable clues for such an investigation. Both artists share an interest in schematised moral and religious conflicts, a belief in fatality, a scepticism towards 'appearances' in life, a belief in the reality of innocence, beauty and love; both favour tragedy and operetta as dramatic forms. The title to a play by Calderon could, in fact, be used to summarise Sirk's attitude towards reality: '*En esta vida todo es verdad y todo es mentira*' (In this life all is truth and all is lies).

FOOTNOTES

1. Siegfried Melchinger: *Drama zwischen Shaw und Brecht*, Bremen, 1957.
2. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No 189, April 1967.
3. Youri Tynianov: 'Desruction, Parodie' (1921) in *Change* No 2, 1969.
4. Tynianov points out that 'the comic is a *colour* which usually accompanies parody, but it is in no way the *colour* of parody itself. If the parody of a tragedy will be a comedy, the parody of a comedy can be a tragedy'.
5. 'Cliche-images' as opposed to 'cliche-situations', the latter being part of the script, not of the treatment.
6. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No 216, translated in *Screen*, Spring 1971.
7. The ideology in question is the 20th century French bourgeois ideology. Obviously, the ideology Sirk seems to convey is its American counterpart.
8. Roland Barthes: 'Réthorique de l'image', in *Communications*, No 4, 1964.
9. It is also relevant to note that in 1911, theatre director Nikolai Evreinov restaged works by Calderon, Lope de Vega and Tirso de Molina in St Petersburg. Spanish drama of the 17th century, exercised a greater influence on the theatrical revolution of 1910 than is usually acknowledged.

The Tarnished Angels

Fred Camper

I

It is possible to discern many intellectual threads running through Sirk's work. This process is facilitated by the fact that there are many moments in his films that seem specifically to crystallise certain themes. At these moments it is less a question of responding to ideas whose only expression is in the subtleties of the visual style, but rather of merely seeing those ideas concretely expressed, and going from that concrete expression — the television shot in *All That Heaven Allows** — to its subtler generalisations which run throughout the film. A director like Sirk, whose films, being 'about themselves', contain specific representations of their truths, might therefore appear easy to analyse.

All of these arguments become inadequate when one confronts *The Tarnished Angels*. This is a film whose ideas occur with such extraordinary density, and almost infinite variety, that to discern all their implications and interconnections would seem an impossible task. It carries the style of films like *Zu Neuen Ufern* — the notion of many 'pivotal' points — to an extreme one might have previously thought impossible. In the frames themselves, objects take on a truly demoniacal force. However, unlike in parts of *The First Legion*, it is not single objects which dominate the frames; this would make things too simple. Rather every shot is cluttered with an unbelievable multiplicity of objects and with areas of texture. Sirk uses widescreen to simply expand on and make more detailed what he had done before. This increased density of expression leads to a feeling of totality, of self-containedness, that helps to make it surpass all of Sirk's previous work.

The narrative form of the film is only nominally a linear progression; once Burke Devlin's involvement with the air gypsies is established (this takes about three minutes) he (and the viewer) is plunged into a world

* Copyright Fred Camper 1971.

of multiple ambiguities so intense that it would seem impossible to emerge from a viewing of this film without its visual resonances still running through one's head. The notion that each part of a Sirk film is comprehensible only in terms of the entire structure, of every other part, is here carried to such an extreme that every one of that infinity of objects seems related to every other. The temptation now is to attempt to chart the interconnections; the folly of this exercise would become apparent as one discovered that there were so many connecting arrows to draw that the paper would soon become a solid area of black ink. The film piles reflection on top of reflection, mockery on top of mockery not in a form of ever-expanding complexity but rather in the context of a complexity which is instantly established by the opening cluttered images of the film. Such a form would seem to render the linear medium of writing powerless to describe it; everything happens at once, and to disentangle these simultaneous events is to separate them and hence reduce their meanings. Nonetheless an attempt shall be made; I shall try to divide the events into categories, and hope, through the enumeration of each, to finally give a sense not of a complexity which was incomprehensible from the beginning but rather of a style each of whose parts seek only to lead us back to a fuller experience of the whole. There is no question that the very density of *The Tarnished Angels* is itself an important characteristic; it is the presence of so many different materialisations simultaneously that obscures and makes impossible the notion of a clear-cut understanding. What Sirk expressed with one event in *All That Heaven Allows*, he expresses with hundreds of events here, but rather than making the ideas dull by repetition, it is their very repetition in such a variety of forms that *becomes* the idea. If one mocking reflection forces the characters back into staticism, imagine what the simultaneous effect of one hundred would be. It is something like standing between two mirrors facing each other. You look into one and see an infinitude of ever-smaller reflections of yourself and the other mirror. You think for a moment that you are looking off into the infinite, until you discover that you are trapped between two mirrors in an endless pattern of reflections, just as every attempt to probe deeper and understand in Sirk leads one back to reflections.

The basic plot of *The Tarnished Angels* has Burke Devlin as a reporter for a New Orleans newspaper. It is Mardi-gras time, and there is an air show in town by the site of a carnival or amusement park. Devlin finds a young boy fighting with a mechanic who is taunting him with 'whose you're old man today, kid?' Devlin stops the fight, gets to talking with the boy, and meets his family: Roger Shumann, his father, a 'war ace' who now flies for prize money; LaVerne, Roger's wife and Jack's mother; and Jiggs, their mechanic. They travel together, have no real home, and are best described as gypsies. Devlin, to quote Sirk, becomes

carried away by this fascinating atmosphere, by their strange sexual ways, by the fact that they are completely different from him, by the infinite feeling of tragedy exuded by their existences.¹ When Roger's plane is damaged, Burke helps him find another to enter in 'the big race'; simultaneously, he is falling in love with LaVerne.

Without even having seen the film one can recognise from this brief summary a situation analogous to that of *Has Anybody Seen My Gal?* or to the scene with Naomi on the lawn looking in at her family in *All I Desire*. Once again, an outsider is contemplating a world which he is separate from but would like to be a part of. This doesn't necessarily mean that the Shumann's world represents anything more real than the one Burke already knows. In fact, this question is perfectly ambiguous in the film, so much so that the ambiguity only reinforces the sense that 'reality' can never be truly seen. On the one hand, the Shumann's simple life, their 'strange sexual ways', can be seen as an escape for Burke into something more real, especially when contrasted with the life he had apparently been leading up until then: evenings of bridge with 'that redhead' and one of the other newspapermen; poker games at his flat; his own problems with alcohol. His life had been a form of impotence; perhaps their strangeness is seen by him as a kind of hoped-for potency. His very description of LaVerne — 'a strange, beautiful, unearthly creature from a faraway planet' — indicates he sees them as a world beyond anything he has known. But it is precisely their strangeness which places them *in* Sirk's world, and thus in the world of the film. The strangeness comes in part from a style of life driven by obsessions even less logically comprehensible than Devlin's characteristically middle-class alcoholism. He gets himself involved with people who ultimately have no more, perhaps less, understanding of life than he does. As he says of them, 'They're a strange race of people, without any blood in their veins at all . . . just crankcase oil'. This clearly and explicitly removes them from flesh-and-blood reality; they are like mere shadows of their planes, unfathomable ghosts. And so his fascination, seen in this light, is not with some higher reality but with even more hopeless and incomprehensible reflections.

There are five other main characters in *The Tarnished Angels*, and each fits into the pattern with remarkable, almost schematic consistency. LaVerne is obsessively in love with Roger, and has degraded herself time after time to be with him. Characteristically, Sirk has her love begin when she saw his picture on a Liberty Bond poster; she had idealised him, and yet that idealisation was based not on the real Roger but on a two-dimensional reduction of him. Jiggs, in turn, is sweet, kind, not very strong, and hopelessly in love with LaVerne. His love is denied all potency, even in his imagination, by the position he accepts, travelling around with them and serving as Roger's mechanic. Matt Ord, a bus-

inessman who owns and races planes, also desires LaVerne. But rather than being cold and calculating, Sirk shows him as equally human. When Burke suggests to him that he might have a relatively crude motivation for racing planes — 'business is business' — Ord replies angrily, 'Business, bull! I just like to race planes, that's all. A man's got to get his kicks one way or another'. These extraordinary lines indicate a measure of real self-knowledge, and perhaps hint at his sexual frustration over LaVerne. Jack Shumann, the child, is used by Sirk not 'as a symbol of purity . . . [but] only in order to show that a new generation is beginning . . . I want to suggest: that they are tragedies that are beginning again, again, and again. . . .' But he is also, at least in the early stages of the film, a character of considerably more dignity than any of the adults. In the first few minutes of the film, Devlin asks him his name, reciting as possibilities a list of crude nicknames one imagines urchins might have; he replies that his name is 'Jack Shumann'. 'Roger Shumann your old man?' 'He's my father.' This, and his responses throughout the film (not going to the 'wake' for his father, for instance; defending himself against the 'who's your old man now' taunts without ever telling his parents), place him apart from the cheapness to which every other character descends. As the film progresses, Jack has less and less to say; he too is trapped in the web of tragic occurrences; and in this sense is a symbol of hopelessness.

Devlin may be our identification-figure, and may give the film its narrative focus, but the formal hub is unquestionably Roger Shumann. He is clearly the most obsessed, and in a sense the blindest character in the film. Devlin, however entranced, is aware of his separation from LaVerne and from everything. Jiggs and Matt Ord are both aware of the hopelessness of their love for LaVerne. LaVerne feels only too strongly the pathos of her own situation. All of these characters are in some sense aware of their blindness. Roger, for most of the film, is not. Like Kyle in *Written On The Wind* (also played by Robert Stack), he seeks out symbols of potency (a gun, cars, in *Written On The Wind*, planes in *Tarnished Angels*) as if to reassure himself, without really being aware of the kind of reassurance he needs, or what his real fears are. This is even more true of *The Tarnished Angels*, in which the theme of impotence is nowhere explicitly stated. Roger is drunk with flying without knowing why. As a result, as he himself admits, LaVerne's love was 'something I didn't know how to accept'. As the film develops, the only real progression that occurs is in Roger, who slowly becomes more and more human toward LaVerne. In the flashback, the earliest scene in their relationship which we see, he is at his coldest and most humiliating. Later in the film, he begs her to help him — although he is also begging her to degrade herself. Then, he seems truly to regret it, and admits tacitly to Burke that he loves her. Finally, he tells her that

he loves her — for the first time in their lives — and promises to give up flying and 'make a new start somewhere'. And then he is killed.

His death will be discussed later in other contexts, but there is one meaning which it has which should be mentioned here. The night before the race, Burke had accused him of being 'a pitiful blind man', to which he responded 'A blind man isn't blind', ending by stating his love for LaVerne. This was his fatal mistake: pretending to understand. The step he takes — saying not only that he loves LaVerne but that he will give up flying — is recognised as unrealistic even by her. He seems to think that he can just walk out of the trap of his obsession, simply start a new life for himself. The other characters — the three men in love with LaVerne, LaVerne in love with Roger — all recognise their powerlessness, how much they are victims of their obsessions. Roger, the most victimised of all, makes the mistake of having pride, of thinking he can be human — 'he died only because he was thinking of the human beings he would kill' if he tried to land. In a sense, his death is the only possible conclusion; it is the only way of visually matching the escape from the film's frames he claims to have effected; it is his punishment for having the temerity to make such a claim.

II

The complexity of the narrative line, with its systems of relationships and illusions, is surpassed by an even greater complexity in the other elements of the film. One might attempt, as I will, to divide the various occurrences of the film up into categories like 'traps' and 'mockeries' and 'reflections', and these may serve as useful signposts; but it is essential to realise that even more than with most films each element can be made to fit into every category. One of the things which creates the complexity is the multiple meanings and implications that each event, each image can have.

More than any other Sirk film, *The Tarnished Angels* is full of images of traps, images which represent the characters as being trapped by various patterns of their surroundings. This is not simply the general notion of everything being frozen into a surface being repeated again; there are numerous specific representations of such traps. The lighting style works toward creating alternating areas of light and darkness; each area seems to encircle or enclose the others; light is surrounded by darkness, or darkness by light. In the sequences at the air show, circular motion is used as a metaphor for a kind of trap. The planes fly in perpetual circles, as if trapped in an endlessly repeating pattern from which there is no escape. Right after the Colonel certifies Roger's plane for the last race, Sirk shows the people moving in circular patterns, which are emphasised by his use of the pan shot at this point. Jack, in the mean-

time, is riding on the 'airplane carousel', an amusement-park ride which carries the 'planes' in which the kids ride in a continuing circular pattern. Sirk intercuts masterfully between the motions of Jack on the ride and the motions of the planes in the sky; he is not simply comparing or paralleling the two, to suggest that 'a new generation is beginning'; but suggesting that both are caught in the same trap. Circular motions suit Sirk's purpose beautifully. Their perpetual, endlessly repeating nature is the equivalence-in-motion for the endlessly repeating details of the static frames; for the notion that within those frames any attempt toward deeper understanding leads you only to more reflections. Circular motion gives the illusion of progress but always returns to the same place. The intercutting of the father and son, and between the race and the shots of the people watching, serves only to freeze the primary action (the race) into a fixed, static and perpetually repeating pattern. The father-son parallel gains a chilling explicitness from a shot in which both the child's amusement-park plane ride and the flight of a real plane, circling in the sky in the same direction, appear; while both go past our eyes from right to left (the illusion of motion) we can already see them starting to turn at the edge of the frame. The fact that the real plane is smoking and about to crash is a foreboding not only for Roger's future, but — via the parallel drawn — for Jack's future. Finally, the airplane carousel becomes the most concrete trap of all: Jack is caught screaming helplessly in its endlessly repeating circles as he sees his father go down. Significantly, we never see him extricated from the machine, but fade out on his despairing cries as it spins around, as if symbolising that he is caught hopelessly in his father's pattern, a 'tragedy . . . beginning again, again. . . .'

The lighting of the film is used to create traps in similar but more explicit ways. In the first of the two scenes between Burke and LaVerne in his flat, there is a shot in which she stands at screen left looking out of the window (it is night). The venetian blinds, which are open, cast a pattern of thin streaks of light on her face, alternated with areas of darkness. This pattern overlays her face so strongly that it is difficult to tell if we are supposed to be looking at the expressions on her face or the patterns of light. Finally, it is clear that her face is frozen into such a pattern, another symbol for the static quality of the frames. At many other points in the film, patterns of light overlay recognisable objects almost like a superimposed matrix, with its own structures and rules independent of the specific characteristics of the photographed objects, thus imposing a further level of abstraction. Alternatively, one might say that the people are trapped beneath patterns of light, whose independence from them binds them all the more to the single surface. The light is almost like an arbitrary external order, imposed from without, a visual correlate of the sense of fatalism in Sirk's narratives.

One additional use of lighting is to create shadows. After Burke convinces LaVerne not to go to Matt Ord in the lobby of his apartment, he watches her climb back up the stairs. She is lit so that her shadow on the wall behind is higher than her body; climbing with her, it is a grotesque kind of parallel, still another example of the presence in the same frame of the supposedly 'real' object and some reflection or other visual representation of it. But by being a schematic reduction, her shadow is able to suggest more, rather than less, of her actual physical being: her body is clearly visible, so in a sense holds no mystery; while her shadow has no fixed form, nor is its presence predictable; hence it is beyond rational understanding and — as a visual correlate of her — holds a kind of inexplicable terror, a suggestion that you are seeing some other hidden side of things, that would not otherwise be visible.

Often characters are seen through panes of glass, another form of trap which binds them to the surface. In *The Tarnished Angels*, this often occurs without a specific narrative explanation. When Burke comes back to his apartment, his entry and ascent up the stairs is shown in shots taken through panes of glass in 'windows' which are high up on the apartment wall. We see not only the dirty glass but the bars and frame of the window. While one could think of all kinds of reasons for endistancing him from the camera at this point — placed in his apartment, where the Shumanns are now staying — on reflection there are equally good reasons in almost every other sequence of the film. The glass acts less as a comment on the narrative at that point than it does as a general metaphor for the situation of the entire film.

III

Sirk traps characters in frozen, static contexts through devices more general than those enumerated above — devices which are integrated with the very form of the film, devices which are expressed by every image. The most readily apparent ones are in the editing, in the manner in which Sirk alters the conventions of narrative form. The tradition of the establishing shot is very deeply rooted in American narrative films; it is only in the last ten or fifteen years that it has been consistently violated. Before showing the newspaper office where Devlin works, the convention would be to have an exterior shot of the building, with the name of the newspaper visible, so that the audience would know where it was, but more important, to indicate the larger context in which interior scenes operate. A film which cuts from one interior to another without any establishing exteriors develops a sense that there is no exterior world; a film entirely of close-ups would give the feeling that the only reality was that of the characters' faces. To avoid this, to place things in a larger context which thereby gives them a firm, balanced place in the

physical order we have come to expect — after all, offices are in buildings which do have an outside, and it is comforting to be reminded of this — a director will use exterior establishing shots, or will use medium and long shots in a scene before cutting to close-up. With this in mind one should consider exterior 'establishing shot' of the newspaper building that precedes the first scene in Devlin's office. The frame is very dark; the words 'New Orleans Picayune' are partially visible in the background of the frame. The frame is dominated by a huge mask being put into place in front of the building. We go from this shot to the interior. When I first saw this image, I was unaware that it was even a shot of the newspaper building — the presence of the mask dominates everything; its grotesque, mocking shape is very characteristic of Sirk. The shot seemed more like a bizarre insert than an establishing shot. But it clearly occupies the position that would be taken by an establishing shot in conventional narrative. To an extent, Sirk subverts this, and tends toward insert, by allowing the mask to absorb so much of the context. But the words of the newspaper name remind us of the shots 'narrative' purpose. The effect of the shot in Sirk's structure is made even stronger by the interpretation of it as an establishing shot. He is saying: the larger world in which the characters operate, the larger order that you see if you pull back from the close-ups and the interior dramatic scenes, is not one of complacently fixed streets and buildings but one of masks, shadows and demons. Rather than giving his interior the balance and fixity of position that it would have if we could place it in the context of a known exterior world, Sirk places it instead in an equally fixed — but much less comforting — context, one of the giant mask. The same might be said for a scene at the air show-carnival, which is introduced by a few brief glimpses of peripheral action — notably, a blind organist. In another series of 'establishing' shots for the carnival, at night, a couple pause and see themselves reflected in a distorted mirror. *The Tarnished Angels* is so dense in grotesqueries that even a mirror reflection is denied physical reality. Just before Shumann's fatal flight, a brief series of shots — perhaps re-establishing shots, perhaps inserts — includes a repetition of the blind organist and the distorted mirror. This repetition has a fatal circularity to it, a sense of inevitably recurring traps, that is another cause for Shumann's death. In this light, the shots of Devlin climbing the stairs seen through glass that were just described may be seen as establishing shots to the scene in his apartment that follows. They thus have the effect of placing him metaphorically behind glass throughout the scene.

Most of the abovementioned images are very brief in duration, perhaps briefer than the normal length for an establishing shot, and insofar as they seem brief they take on the quality of inserts. This double-meaning is perfectly consistent. In fact Sirk systematically uses inserts to further

develop a context which, like that established by the opening shots, entraps the characters' actions; finally, entraps everything in the film. Some of the scenes of the Mardi-gras have the quality of inserts, especially in the bizarre close-ups. In the second scene between Burke and LaVerne in his apartment, inserts of the 'party next door' are used masterfully throughout to maintain the sense of the party's presence over the actions of Burke and LaVerne. In many of the shots, the faces of the crowd of people are not visible; they take on the quality of anonymous, threatening demons. Intercutting places the existence of Burke and LaVerne in the context of those demons, freezing them into the same pattern.

Like the shot of Burke coming up the stairs through glass, the mirror shot which opens the flashback both establishes and endstances at the same time. Endstancing is well used here, since it is the past; and the mirror is far better suited to Sirk's purpose than a wavy optical dissolve or than fuzzy, out-of-focus frames would be. By beginning this action with a mirror, Sirk gives the sense that the *real* reality of those characters are their mirror-reflections. The first mirror shot places the characters close together, almost compressed; the dark images that preceded it make the people, whose bodies now are relatively large in the frame, seem almost physically real. The subsequent shots of the 'real' rather than mirror images somehow seem, while more 'realistic', to be less immediate. It is as if the mirror shot expressed everything about their state; the following shots are merely the specific acting-out of that situation. This is confirmed by the end of the scene, in which the camera pulls back to include again in the frame the mirror with which the scene began; now their reflections are smaller, but the consciously planned nature of the pull-back — obviously designed to make those reflections visible again — doubly-encloses the action by them, making them a kind of sign or metaphor for everything which occurs. This is all particularly well-suited to the traumatic and degrading actions which occur in this scene; the correlate (and greater) trauma is that the characters can never be as real as their reflections.

The final effect of Sirk's editing is to place each scene in a kind of frozen pattern which allows it to exist only in the context of every other scene in the film. Thus all the masks, demons, surfaces cannot be taken as little inserts or 'directorial touches' but only as causal elements which effect and help determine every shot, every action of the film.

In keeping with its extraordinary density of occurrences, the film is full of characteristic mockeries, many of them connected in some way with sexual desire. From a shot of Matt Ord's face as he looks desirously at LaVerne in the distance Sirk dissolves to the same shot of the mask being put into place that serves as an 'establishing shot' for the first scene in the newspaper office. This gives this latter shot an added mean-

ing; the mask mocks Ord and his desire. When Roger's plane crashes into the water, LaVerne runs to the shore and is restrained by two men, one of them in a clown's costume. The intercutting between Roger in his 'real' plane and Jack in the airplane carousel, in addition to drawing parallels, has the effect of mocking Roger's flying, and the potency that it represents to him. By placing his flying in the same context as the airplane carousel ride, Sirk implies that on some level they are the same.

Mockery is perhaps an unfortunate word to use; it suggests that the film is making fun of itself almost to the point of silliness, without conveying the hideous power of these images. But in numerous shots objects or areas of the frame take on a force which cannot be denied. The strongest example occurs in the second scene between Burke and LaVerne; he tells her that he cares for her, and she implies that perhaps she can see in him a real feeling, without the degradation that Roger has forced her into. They kiss, and the moment has all the fascinating, almost forbidden unnaturalness of those moments when Sirk appears to be approaching 'real' things. It seems a little wrong, somehow out of the context of the film, that the outsider Devlin and the 'unearthly' gypsy with whom he is so fascinated could be embracing; yet it is so sweet because for a moment one might be deluded into forgetting all the demons, the separation, and imagine real sensual feeling. At what seems precisely the tenderest and most hypnotic moment, Sirk cuts to the door bursting open and a death-mask lunges forward a few inches through the doorway, looking at the characters. Cut to the horrified characters, and back to the man removing his death-mask (he's from the 'party next door', whose sound we had heard and which we caught a glimpse of in the hall as Burke entered), throwing his head back and laughing hideously at Burke and LaVerne.

It is impossible to render the power of this moment in words. In an instant, Sirk totally devastates the entire possibility of human feeling and happiness. A viewer fully responding to the film might well react to the image with a feeling of total, physical collapse, as if all one's organs and blood had suddenly departed, leaving only an empty shell. The mask pushes forward out of the flatness of the frame; on a superficial level, it has emerged from the surface, a power always denied to Sirk's characters. It has so many meanings all at once that it cannot possibly be a singular symbol — it mocks their idea of feeling, ridicules their sexual desire with its dark, hollow sunken eyes, intrudes into the privacy they thought they had as if to say that no one is ever alone from, or separated from, the hideousness of the world. This is not to say that Sirk separates his characters from the world and attributes their troubles to it — ultimately, the pressures of the external world are merely another way of representing the processes going on inside the characters, while the characters' obsessions mirror the nature of the larger world. This general

double meaning, which fits in well with the multiple meanings that many of the images take, emphasises again the manner in which a variety of possible approaches and points of view are combined into a single unity by Sirk.

There is a simpler associative parallel involved with the mask image which should also be mentioned. Towards the end of the first scene between Burke and LaVerne, they had been talking to one another with obviously developing feeling, LaVerne revealing to Burke how she feels about Roger, Jiggs, her past. Suddenly, Roger's face becomes visible behind the screen mesh in the door to the bedroom, becoming clearer as he approaches the door, finally opening it and coming out into the room. His first appearance is genuinely terrifying, like a ghost emerging from darkness; and also because he is the husband — and the man LaVerne still loves — in the triangle that has developed. When his form first appears, one wonders if he knows what has been going on, even if he will suddenly avenge himself against them. This notion of him, which implies a certain kind of potency, is ridiculed by his own first words, that he was awakened out of a nightmare that had him going down in flames, 'shot down by Baron von Richthofen'. It is clear that he is more obsessed by his flying, than he is interested in his wife. At the same time the very image 'shot down by Baron von Richthofen' has a kind of familiarity, a sense that it is something he might have read about in a popular magazine, that almost calls into question even the reality with which he experiences his very escape from reality, flying.

The second scene between Burke and LaVerne directly parallels the first in terms of narrative action. Again, LaVerne is revealing her feelings, 'letting her hair down' to Burke, and he is reacting sympathetically and encouraging it. But now, in place of the familiar occurrence of the jealous husband bursting in at the moment of the first kiss, we have the mask; and instead of a forward thrusting potent revenge which the mask first hints at, the episode concludes with the middle-aged man unmasked and writhing in ridiculous (even self-mocking) laughter. This parallel works both ways: the mask gains added force from its connection with the 'jealous husband'; the husband is rendered ridiculous by his reduction to the mask (and further by the whole situation: he is busy watching Jiggs trying to fix a plane at the time all this happens).

Finally, the mask is suggestive of sexual fears, devastation, impotence. In a film with so many 'pivotal' moments in the story, this mask stands out with a force which effects one's entire perception of the film. Every door, every screen, is finally made to seem to hold behind it some nameless terror which is simply waiting for the proper moment to emerge.

That even such powerful images are also mockeries is made even clearer in a scene in which Devlin is talking to Matt Ord in the foreground. In

the background, at screen right, is a tent. During their conversation the tent opens and a group of men emerges carrying the coffin of one of Ord's best pilots who was killed the previous day when he collided with Shumann. This emergence has a strange, haunting force; yet as the camera pans following the coffin a plane comes into view in the foreground which soon occupies most of the frame, obscuring the coffin itself; the words 'Jolly Joe' are plainly visible on the plane. A similar image occurs in the shot of Roger's plane being lifted out of the water. It is night, and as the plane's shape comes up, lit by unnatural lights, it takes on a bizarre, twisted appearance; though in fact not that badly deformed, it has the impact of a horribly twisted wreck. This comes partly from its vertical position, partly from the lighting, and partly from its emergence as an object out of a frame of dark surfaces. It also stands for Roger; it is all that has been recovered of his dream; another mockery. But its bizarreness gives it some strength and force, until Sirk pans in typically irrelevant fashion (from the point of view of filming only the story) to a couple in brightly striped clown's clothing kissing passionately in a parked car. Their embrace has a kind of obscenity to it, occurring in the context that it does; their feelings rendered absurd by their dress, they are just another example of the ideas of the film as a whole.

There are a number of bizarre objects which do not, at least at the simplest level, reduce to mockeries. From the shot which follows the pan to 'Jolly Joe', Sirk cuts to a high shot which includes the coffin again, now in the background of the frame. Part of the foreground is filled with a huge airplane propellor, so close as to be unrealistically large. In the sequence of Roger's first race, in which Ord's pilot is killed, there are shots of Devlin with the carnival in the background; planes fly past in the sky, but now seem to be unusually, grotesquely large. Both shots resemble the scene in *Imitation Of Life* in which Sarah Jane runs from the schoolhouse, with Annie following her, and a fire hydrant is made to seem huge by its placement in the foreground.

These distortions of perspective resemble the manner in which Roger's plane is made to seem twisted, with its vertical position in the frame and strange lighting, as it is pulled out of the water. All are additional examples of Sirk's denials of 'true' perspective for his objects; they are either too large, or too small, or take on some new and bizarre shape. Each distortion has associated with it a strange, almost unnatural power.

A similar power can be felt in the surging crowds of people at the air show. With faces and appearances as anonymous as those of the people at the party, they cheer almost mindlessly. Brief shots of them often include a few people standing up, as if to indicate that the crowd has the power to thrust forward out of the surface of the frame. There is rarely

any reason for them to stand up, any more than there is any reason for the mask to burst into Devlin's apartment. Thus their action has the kind of unpredictability that is so powerful in Sirk. But given a reason, when Shumann is attempting to land, they rush forward into the frame and surge out on to the field with mindless insanity, despite the announcer's pleas to 'clear the field', that Shumann 'must have room' to land'. The fact that they thus cause his death gives them, in retrospect, a still more terrifying presence.

In the clutter of objects that fills so many frames, each object can have individual power. But the many areas of darkness, frozen into the same texture, function as objects and can have equal, even greater power; since their content is not clearly visible, there is no limit to what they can hide, or to what horrors can materialise out of them. In the first scene between Burke and LaVerne, the shot already described of LaVerne looking out of the venetian blinds, is dark on the right half of the frame. In the second scene between the two of them, there is a shot with one on each side of the frame and an area of darkness in between; its central position gives it a position of prominence in the frame, exerting an uncanny influence on it. In the same scene, the section before the mask bursts in, has very dark, out-of-focus and only barely visible backgrounds. Diffuse shapes seem to linger in the darkness like foreboding presences only waiting for the chance to emerge, as they soon do, materialised in the appearance of the death-mask.

IV

In the light of these remarks, it would seem that object power in Sirk is not simply a casual device employed from time to time for reasons of emphasis or symbolism (the camera moves in significantly on the words 'I love you' written on an old dance card . . .) but rather a general visual characteristic of his frames. Indeed, 'object power' applies to the most general meaning given here to the word 'object': any distinct area of light or texture in the frame.

Sirk's objects in *The Tarnished Angels* do not radiate a pure determinist force of which they are the source and sole repository; they do not have the kind of primary causal independence of Brakhage's 'blobs' or even the symbolic independence of Murnau's death-symbols. All their power exists within, and in fact *comes from*, the very interdependence of the parts of the frame. This is the result of the nature of Sirk's perspective. When the camera pans to the plane with 'Jolly Joe' written on it, the plane comes to obscure the coffin from view. Rather than passing the words 'Jolly Joe' in the pan, perhaps with a 'significant' pause on them, and then continuing on past the plane to follow the coffin again, Sirk stops on those words; when he wants to return to following the

coffin's movement, he does so by cutting. The effect of the camera halting on the words 'Jolly Joe' is to shift our attention from the motion of the coffin to the static words; as the plane comes to obscure the coffin completely, we forget it completely and see only the surface before us.

This is an aspect of an important general truth about Sirk's images. Many times an object in the foreground will obscure part or all of an object in the background. When this occurs in situations in 'real life', our natural tendency is to complete the lines of the object hidden in our imagination. This is possible because we have learned that the world is three-dimensional, that things continue to exist even when they are obscured from our view. The consequent tendency of our 'natural perception' would be to imagine that the coffin is still moving behind the words 'Jolly Joe'. But the words are thrust forward with such prominence, and such an inescapable static quality, that such a natural extension of vision is made impossible. More generally, each object in Sirk exists *only* as we see it. The flat surfaces of his frames specifically exclude any completion of lines in the mind's eye; to allow this would be to allow a romantic belief in 'reality', to admit the notion that there are higher orders of reality than the two-dimensional one of the movie screen. Sirk specifically denies this, thus working against our entire learned sense of three-dimensional perspective; this is one reason why 'falseness' and 'flatness' seem so intuitively apt if not strictly accurate in describing his images.

A Sirk frame, then, is a two-dimensional visual field of objects whose only existence is their order in the frame. But by excluding any other reality, the frame in effect presents itself as the only reality. A sequence of frames which do not have any particularly bizarre or powerful objects will thus lead us into a relatively complacent state, in which we accept the reality of the images and the continuity of the vision that they establish. The surfaces of *All That Heaven Allows* lead us into an acceptance of their own beauty as reality.

It is this very acceptance, this 'complacency,' that Sirk uses to give his objects power. The television track in *All That Heaven Allows* gains such a pivotal force *from* its very insertion into a series of surfaces. In *The First Legion*, a series of images of flat walls and nondescript rooms gives way to an image of a statue of Blessed Joseph right in front of a wall. Since the perspective operating is one which denies us a knowledge of anything behind the object, the effect is to show us a wall *disrupted* by a statue; a statue frozen into a wall. This is of course quite contrary to our normal expectations about walls and statues, and thus the statue takes on a kind of strange power or force. Its presence is specifically 'irrational', where rational means our every-day perspective and view of things. This feeling continues as long as the statue is in the frame. Some

of Sirk's objects seem placed 'naturally' or inconspicuously enough for their continued presence to cause us to accept them with complacency; more often, objects like the statue are shown in the process of continued tension with their surroundings. The continued tension is another reason why areas in Sirk never blend together; objects are not placed to 'blend' but to offer dramatic contrasts. The plane being pulled out of the water in *The Tarnished Angels* seems to have been made deliberately grotesque; there can never be harmony between it and the dark surfaces from which it emerged.

Object power in Sirk is a result of the objects' *placement* in the frame. It comes neither from the object nor from the surroundings but from the interaction between the two. Each object and area, like each section of the narrative line, is like a piece of a puzzle which would be incomplete and hence meaningless without every other piece, but whose pieces are not of equal size or importance. It is only within the context of the surface that objects can have power; appearing to thrust from it and have a power denied to the characters (the death-mask is powerful only as a mask; the appearance of the man behind it tends to render that seen power ridiculous) they ultimately return all parts of the frame to the surface. Mockeries like 'Jolly Joe' occupy an importance equal to the thing mocked, so that eventually one perceives this distinction to be meaningless; the thing and its mockery are in fact the same.

There are very few sections of *The Tarnished Angels* with a flatness as great as that of sections of *The First Legion* or *All That Heaven Allows*. As noted, grotesque objects fill almost every frame from the opening credits to the last shot of the plane and pylon. Consequently every frame contains several 'key' or pivotal objects or events; each single frame of *The Tarnished Angels* has a complexity that is duplicated only by taking entire sequences of a film like *Zu Neuen Ufern*. With a few exceptions, most of which have already been mentioned, frames are never dominated by single objects. Rather each appears to have a number of poles or objects which it is constructed around. Nor are these objects of equal character and kind. In the first scene between LaVerne and Burke, a shot already described places her on screen left looking out of the window with streaks of light on her face from venetian blinds, while the right area of the screen is in darkness. Conventional scope framing would seek to direct our attention towards her face; the darkness would appear relatively unimportant and in the background. In this shot, however, the static quality of the image makes the darkness seem equally powerful, equally as important, as her face. The darkness exists not in the narrow sense a reflection of it; they are different kinds of things, and Sirkian mockery depends on seeing one thing reflected in the other. Yet it seems as much the 'subject' of the image as her face. In

the amusement park scenes, the numerous rides and crowds of people often fill the backgrounds around the characters. They do not have a feeling of continuity behind the characters, because as stated Sirk does not allow any such imaginary completion of a scene in the background in the mind's eye. But these details, being delimited by the characters' outlines, also seem to be working the other way, to be limiting the characters; they fill the areas between them with a feeling common in Sirk of the background thrusting forward with as much reality and importance as the foreground. One could make many metaphorical relations between the characters and these background details, but these would all be somewhat fanciful in the sense that they exist outside the formal content of the shots. What is important is that while we feel that the characters' bodies represent something crucial to the film, so we feel that the details in the carnival represent something else which is equally essential.

V

The beauty of *The Tarnished Angels* is that it ultimately brings all of these things together. One might say that on the level of a viewer's first perception, *The Tarnished Angels* contains several categories of things. One category is the characters and the objects which mock them, shown to be the same; another is the various background details of the setting, apparently with no specific relation to the narrative: the things at the carnival, in the newspaper office, or the dimly visible shapes in Burke's apartment in his second scene with LaVerne; a third is the more abstract patterns of light and darkness that play on the characters' faces and in the background like a separate matrix of light superimposed over the lines of the film. This variety of categories, rather than being arbitrary, corresponds to a series of different levels on which the film's meaning is conveyed. There is the level of the story or plot, discussed earlier; there is the literal level of meaning, the specific mockeries and relationships enumerated; there is the more general inter-relationship of the characters with their surroundings; and finally, there is the use of pure patterns of light and dark, independently of the positions of the characters and objects. All of these levels occur together; and what is remarkable is that insofar as it is possible to translate the implications of each level into words, they all convey the same thing.

It is easiest to discern meanings on the most literal levels. The story follows six main characters. The five adults are an almost systematic enumeration of various forms of delusion: specifically, desires which are seen by the characters to be hopeless at the very instant when those desires are felt. When Matt Ord first sees LaVerne, there is a shot of him looking at her followed by a shot of her, presumably from his point of view. Rather than a sensual close panning shot which would show us

her physical beauty, lending credulity and even reality to his fascination, Sirk cuts to a shot of her walking along in the distance, with the foreground and the background behind her filled with airplanes, which the perspective of the shot make gigantic and grotesque. The bright sunlit ground is also covered with a pattern of shadows cast by the planes. It would be an understatement to say that one effect of the shot is to drain LaVerne of any sensual reality. The planes' presence renders Ord's desire ridiculous even as he feels it. Insofar as characters come to believe that the things they desire are possible — Devlin believing in and idealising LaVerne, Roger and LaVerne believing that they can go back in time and make a new start, Roger believing that he 'isn't blind', so the film proceeds to devastate each of these beliefs. Furthermore, the very pattern of tangled inter-relationships between people, with past and present degradations intertwined with hopes for better things, makes it impossible for any character to see his way to a clear path out of this web of delusion. The pattern is self-perpetuating; the multiplicity of relationships serve only to reproduce themselves, 'again, again and again'.

The literal 'mockeries' and reflections have been discussed in considerable detail earlier. But the nature of the relationships between object and its reflection is something which is paralleled throughout the film, in the relationship of characters to all their surroundings. The background of the carnival, or the details of the newspaper office could not be said to be 'mocking' anything. But they assert their presence with almost demoniacal force, filling the area of the frame allotted to them and asserting their importance. The characters are always held in equal balance with the background because while all areas in the frame remain separate from each other they are all fused at once into a single whole. The background of the carnival thus has a strong presence. It allows the characters no more privacy than Griff and Jenny are allowed in the oil-camp of *Shockproof*. This sense of the intrusiveness of the background exists in every scene in the film.

At the same time, there is a sense in which every object in the film can be called a reflection of every other. This is a notion which pervades Sirk but which has its fullest realisation in *The Tarnished Angels*; it colours and determines every inter-relationship in the film. Quite often, objects are reflections of themselves. A clear example occurs in the opening scene. Burke and Jack sit down on a bench in a grandstand. They are placed in the lower left of the frame; the rest is filled with endless rows of benches, all empty, stretching to the side of the frame and off into the background. The benches almost seem to be absurdly multiplying themselves. In the shot of LaVerne from Matt Ord's point of view with the plane in the foreground, the planes and their shadows

have a similar effect, the planes and their shadows all being reflections of each other. The same is true of the huge crowds which fill the grandstand and the frame, each person's presence being reproduced in every other. In a similar fashion, it may be said of the story that each character mirrors every other; the same pattern of unattainable hopes recur in each main character in the film.

More complex patterns of reflections relate apparently disparate objects. In the scene of Roger's 'wake' at Claude's, Matt Ord speaks to LaVerne and offers her a job. They are on screen left; to the right of them is a mirror in which reflects not only their images but many other background details of the room. Beside the mirror are a few additional objects. This combination renders every background detail as just another reflection. Imagine that you are looking at a Sirk frame filled with objects. One of the objects, instead of being real, is a mirror, and in this mirror you see another object not otherwise visible in the frame. Your primary awareness is not of the mirror as a mirror but of the mirror as the object it is reflecting. Then, aware that the object is in fact a reflection which Sirk has placed on the same level as the other objects, one begins to see that the other objects also *function as* reflections. Whether they are in fact reflections is not important. The presence of one reflection in a Sirk frame is enough to make everything else seem like a reflection.

The reason for this is the two-dimensional static quality which forms the basis of Sirk's style. All areas are held in equal but separate balance. The final consequence of this is that no matter how different from each other in quality and kind different things in the frame may seem, on a certain level they are all equated and made the same by Sirk's style. *The Tarnished Angels*, to be sure, is filled with an unbelievable variety of different representations. We have been stressing this difference. But it is a difference whose ultimate impact lies in the metaphysical sameness of everything. Imagine a series of scraps of paper lain on a table. Each paper has a different word written on it. Some words are similar, for instance 'happiness', 'contentment', 'joy'; or are the opposites of these qualities, ie 'anguish' or 'despair'. Other words seem to relate tangentially to these, but are of a different character — say, verbs or adverbs instead of nouns — eg 'enjoy' or 'sadly'. Still other words seem to be totally irrelevant both in form and content — 'cities', 'villages', 'farms'. A person who lived in the world of those scraps of paper, whose only form of knowledge was the content of the words written on them, would see the world as consisting of an infinite variety of things, some inter-related and some completely different. We, as the observers looking at that table, would see only the scraps of paper; having heard the words and seen their materialisations in far more real con-

texts, they would have little significance for us. It is the physical presence of the scraps of paper with words written on them that we would notice first and primarily. The actual content of those words would be much less important. We would see not difference, but sameness.

It should be apparent that the world of scraps of paper is intended to be an analogy for the world of a Sirk film. The scraps themselves are the multiple objects in *The Tarnished Angels*; the words written on them are the meanings one might associate with those objects. Some are similar, or opposites which are of the same kind, as: 'sexual desire, wish for happiness, mockery of desire, mockery of happiness'. Others are related but of different kind, as: the impossibility of real feeling (as represented by elements of the script), and the grotesqueness (unreality) of Shumann's plane being pulled out of the water. Others appear to have no verbal relationship at all, such as the impossibility of real feeling (in the script) and the areas of darkness in certain frames, or the city building visible through the window in the office of Devlin's newspaper. One could not write a clear verbal idea on the scrap of paper representing this building; the building itself does not have such a meaning. So, to the characters who people the films, who are analogous to the person who lives in the world of scraps of paper to whom all intellectual knowledge is represented by the words he can read on those scraps, the clear relationships and mockeries are apparent although infinitely various, and the many other elements have the effect only of confusing one by their very variety. This is very important: in a sense, it is the multiplicity of different object materialisations that leads to despair.

One should not mistake the foregoing as implying that the characters see absolutely nothing except the most obvious verbal representations of objects. All *intellectual* knowledge is contained in the words; but the characters, like the person living in the scraps, also see the physical shape of the scraps themselves. They see these shapes from the two-dimensional position in which, scraps being the only reality, they can fill all space; and in which their shape can be as grotesque and powerful as a three-dimensional apparition in one of our 'real-life' nightmares. To the characters, objects act as materialisations on several levels: as materialisations of ideas, via the words written on them; and as materialisations of otherwise inexplicable feelings which result from their shapes. It is these inexplicable shapes that are the most confusing; their variety, like the variety of mockeries, obscures the possibility of any clear focus to one's seeing. Ultimately one has a feeling that there are various common grounds existing between all the different materialisations; that they are all materialisations of the same thing. But if there are any number of equally true possible ways of seeing a thing, as the multiple materialisations suggest, then the true nature of that thing can never be

seen at all. From the characters' point of view, the existence of a common ground is felt only very faintly, and the differences are the most apparent. This is one of the reasons for their blindness.

But we, the audience of a Sirk film, live outside the world of the scraps of paper, outside of Plato's cave. To us, these scraps appear as merely that. We see their quality *as scraps* more clearly than we see the different meanings written on them. They have different meanings, to be sure, but all those meanings are of a single kind: they are all words written on scraps of paper. Thus the two-dimensionality of Sirk's frames effects an equivalence in meaning between all things contained therein. The deepest meaning turns out to be the outward qualities of the ideas, the medium through which they are expressed, rather than the content of those ideas themselves. Which brings us back to a notion we have mentioned before: that the ultimate subject of Sirk's films is their own style, a feeling for appearance as actually having more 'substance' than what is usually thought of as substance. In the plane cockpit of *Written On The Wind*, our attention is directed to the colour on Kyle's face rather than to the face itself or to the events of the story. The true substance is not the words on the paper but the perception of the world *as* those scraps. The real beauty is then the shapes of the scraps of paper, and the way they are arranged — eg the pattern of objects in Sirk's frames — not specifically what the objects represent.

This is not to say that there is no difference between different objects in Sirk. They can still have the widely different associative functions I have attributed to them, corresponding to the different words written on the papers. What I am saying is that in the total, overall view, those objects are all of the same piece. It is on this level that the backgrounds and the characters represent the same thing; in fact, this analogy was introduced first to explain how the relationship between characters and all their background mirror the more specific object-mockeries. Now it can be seen that they are fundamentally the same.

This is not to say that a Sirk film should be watched at all times from the position of an 'omniscient observer', outside of the flat world of the frames. Indeed, Sirk does make specific use of our 'omniscience' or knowledge of three-dimensional reality in his expression, by playing on and using our expectations about spatial depth and the wholeness of objects. And finally, to understand the total implications of his works, one must step outside them and understand how they function as wholes. But it is also essential that we take on the position of the characters; that we see the films' worlds through their eyes. For the real beauty lies not in the *fact* that what we are seeing as reality is actually words on scraps, but in the very arrangement of those scraps themselves, an arrangement which can only be seen by a citizen of this two-dimensional

world. So the viewer must suspend his conscious expectations about reality, and allow Sirk's world to completely envelop him, to become a total truth. When Sirk wishes to play on our outside knowledge of reality, he can call it forth readily, for it never really leaves you. What is hardest, and what the viewer should try to do, is to suspend it, suspend all preconceptions about how the world should be, and experience all things from the positions of Sirk's blind men. *The Tarnished Angels* encourages us to take the positions of all the characters at once, to see things in a great variety of ways. From the position of a character inside the film, this has the effect of confusing and obscuring any possible understanding. From outside the film, we see that understanding is not possible because the very materials of 'real' perception are systematically excluded from the film.

Being a 'citizen' of Sirk's world involves accepting his two-dimensional perspective as reality, accepting the constant and grotesque re-formation of objects and surfaces that occur when part of one is obscured from view by an object in front of it. The grotesqueness of objects' shapes comes from our inability to see beyond and around them, our inability to distinguish between the boundaries of the object and the patterns of light cast upon it.

For as the arrangement of the scraps, of the objects, is a higher or more general beauty than the inter-connections of their verbal content, if any, so in a sense the highest or most abstract beauty of all in *The Tarnished Angels* is the beauty of light. The areas of light and darkness in the lighting that overlay the characters and objects have their own special logic, one which is totally independent of any verbal or intellectual associations. These light patterns can themselves take on power, much in the manner in which objects do. In the shot of LaVerne looking out of the venetian blinds with streaks of light on her face, we are aware first of her face, then instantly that it is covered with this pattern. The pattern forces us to see her face in a new way; finally, to see it only in terms of that pattern, just as an object forces us to see the field it is placed in in terms of the object, as being disrupted by it, as being re-shaped by its presence. The death-mask is not a single object but is composed of areas of light and dark; the dark hollow of its sunken eyes, the areas of chalky light on it, create feelings as strong as those created by its presence as a whole object. *The Tarnished Angels* is best seen as an interplay of light and dark with shades of light often coming together into lines to crystallise an object, and just as often re-forming objects into new ones. Like every other element of the film, light and dark offer both infinite variety — the ability to re-form any object into a new one — and sameness, as, the reduction of images to patterns of light and dark with no regard for the 'reality' of objects or depth finally expresses a single quality of seeing.

VI

In terms of the general criticism of soap operas on the grounds that they set up false choices as part of a kind of cheating romanticism, *The Tarnished Angels* can hardly be faulted. In fact, the working-out of its narrative can be seen as a specific *answer* to such a false romanticism.

Burke Devlin, the outsider who is fascinated but cannot be a part of the air gypsies' lives, gets deeply involved with them. For a time, his actions seem more rational than Roger's or LaVerne's; he seems to see their situation more clearly than they do. He points out to LaVerne her degradation, and helps her — or appears to be helping her — to see some way out of her miserable existence. He is able to be rational about talking to Matt Ord when Roger says Ord wouldn't speak to him — although, as it finally appears, Ord would have been flattered if Roger had seen him in a friendly way and asked for help. As an audience-identification figure, he seems to be the only stable signpost in an insane world. In this context, the situation between Devlin and LaVerne would appear to be setting up a very strong 'if only': 'If only Burke and LaVerne could get married, then they would both be happy'. As it turns out, this assumes that both characters are much more balanced than they actually are; and we don't only find this out at the end of the film, there are indications of it all along. First, Burke's alcoholism. Second, his first plea to his editor to let him cover the air show. He speaks of the gypsies in cheaply romantic newspaper prose, the kind of thing a small-town radio reporter might say to make things sound colourful. This tendency is carried to an even greater extreme in his second speech to his editor, after Shumann's death. The interesting thing about both speeches is that much of what Burke says is true about the characters in the film. Shumann really 'doesn't have any blood in his veins — just crankcase oil'. He really *did* become a human being — if only on the level of the script — at the moment when he told LaVerne, 'I love you'. And he really did die because 'he was thinking of the human beings he might kill if he tried to land'. But when Burke follows that with, 'because among them there was a woman and a little boy whose love he had learned to accept', it becomes clear that he is really 'laying it on', something that has been apparent all along by the melodramatic tone of his voice. While his speech conveys feeling, the nature of that feeling is so clichéd, so popular-romantic, that one wonders if he is capable of any other kind of feeling. In his second speech, it cannot be argued that he is trying to 'sell' his editor on his story; he's too drunk and uncaring for that. The speech obviously 'comes from the heart'; but its very falseness calls into question the nature of all the feelings that he appeared to have for LaVerne. She seems to be no more to him than his overly melodramatic prose. And so the very falseness of Burke's feelings makes it clear that a real love was never possible; he never knew the Shumanns

even for their own equally limited and two-dimensional selves, but only in his false romanticisation of them. Its very falseness prevents us from identifying with it, and thus does not allow this 'if only' to be raised.

LaVerne's romanticisation of Roger is somewhat more real and honest. There is no apparent inherent falseness in the picture that she has of Roger, other than the fact that it derives from his picture on a Liberty Bond poster. But that image, that love, leads her into the exactly opposite state: one of degradation. For a time, she accepts this duality; soon, the degradation causes the romanticisation to pale. It is then revived, and called to its most real form, by Roger's declaration of love and promise to 'make a new start somewhere', only to be completely shattered by his death. At this point, LaVerne turns completely anti-romantic. She will no longer allow even the slightest idealisation: witness the episode with Jiggs's boots. She will now accept only cold facts. Burke persuades her to leave Matt Ord only when he tells her of the humiliation Jack has already experienced; his earlier appeals to her romanticism and memories of Roger left her totally unmoved. In a sense, she is the least blind character at the film's end; she recognises that romanticism is a blind alley; she learns her own limitations.

The primary 'if only' one might find in the film is 'If only' Roger had lived and won the race; then they would have 'taken the prize money and made a new start somewhere'. There are several reasons why this never operates. For one thing, none of the characters ever enunciate it. Roger's death is accepted as a fact, something which has occurred and cannot be further questioned. The only person who comes close is Devlin, in his speech to his editor in which he blames Roger's death on the crowds. More important, there is an additional reason for Roger's death beyond those already given. There is a sense of fatalism in Sirk's narrative forms — clearest of all in the A-B-A structure of *A Time To Love And A Time To Die* — which decrees as a kind of given that happiness will be snatched away at the moment when it appears to be grasped. There is an almost sadistic force connected with this; a feeling that an agent is at work which has some of the irrationally strong power of Sirk's objects. But finally, a perception of Roger's true situation (blind to a world larger than the scraps of paper) will reveal that his death cannot raise any great idealisations of what he was and might have been, because in fact he never really had life. In this context, his 'I love you' to LaVerne is more an expression of his desire to grasp something more real than his immediate situation. Believing that he has found it, when we as viewers outside of Sirk's world know that he has not, is his fatal mistake.

A more general reason for the exclusion of 'if onlys' from Sirk's narrative can be found in its structure as a whole. The film never allows

romantic identification with a single character. Burke is the most obvious identification-figure; the falseness we have found in his feelings and expressions works to endistance him from the audience. But there is no single situation which is allowed to dominate the film. Roger may be at the intuitive centre of the action, but the presence of such a centre does not exclude the existence of other poles, other centres, which although we might not see in as much detail are presented with a kind of equality. The character of Matt Ord is one such example. His desires have been shown to be similar to many of the other characters. But he is not there simply as a symbolic parallel; in his scenes, he is allowed as much presence as any of them. When LaVerne finally leaves him, the camera stays on his face, wrapped in shadows, *gazing forlornly after her*. Although the event which has just occurred is crucial for LaVerne and Jack, Sirk chooses to focus on Matt Ord. Instead of having one or two pivotal characters, *The Tarnished Angels* has many.

This multiplicity prevents any romantic identification; it has been shown to also pervade the deeper levels of the style. A similar anti-romanticism is the result: objects are never more than what they seem; they may suggest more, but they never actually *become* more. Any suggestive power they have is limited by the static quality of the frames. Yet the film's multiplicity of simultaneous occurrences, as dense and obfuscating as it may appear at first, actually leads quite systematically to the perception of a single truth about all the objects. Every internal relationship, every mockery, every narrative event is like a simplified verbalisation of the general truth or situation of the film — a situation I tried to describe with the scraps of paper analogy. The other resonances of such events must always be seen in the context of this general direction which the events point to.

Another name for the mockeries of the film might be 'reductions'. The dissolve from Matt Ord's face watching LaVerne to the mask *reduces* his sexual desire to the grotesqueness of a mask. The narrative level of the film is a reduction, or verbal one-dimensional representation, of the film's whole pattern of meaning. Devlin reduces real feeling to his cheap newspaper prose. Numerous pictures and printed signs in the film serve similarly; the poster advertising 'The Shumanns' in the opening scene, or the Liberty Bond poster of Roger. Two pivotal moments occurring in the last part of the film seem to sum up and include all the various kinds of reductions in the film. The first occurs just after Roger's plane has crashed. Sirk cuts from a shot of LaVerne struggling with the men holding her back to a shot of what she sees. We had just seen the plane hitting and turning over on the water. Now Sirk cuts to calm water with a small circle of turbulence and a tiny wisp of smoke where the plane went down. Superimposed on the surface of water, this area draws a strange

power from its unexpected placement. As an object, it seems to sum up the entirety of what the film has to offer: the whole sense of the reduction of human effort to absurdity and nothingness. One thinks: all human desire and emotion has come to this; all Roger's striving for success, all Jiggs's work on the plane; all Burke's desire to help them; all LaVerne's and Jack's love. The object around which all these things materialised — Roger in his plane — is now only a tiny wisp of smoke. The second reduction is in the last shot. LaVerne's plane flies away; as it does so, it grows smaller and smaller in the sky. At the same time, the sky seems to thrust forward to the surface of the frame. The plane, which one might imagine is travelling off into the distance, to a new freedom, is actually trapped in the surface. The plane leaves the frame and the end titles come on over a pylon standing against an empty sky. LaVerne and Jack are not going to find happiness — the rightness of the ending comes from a feeling that they have recognised their own hopelessness; thus there is no conflict, only acceptance. This coincides with the greatest unity to be found in Sirk: the unity of all the disparate ideas on the scraps which results from the fact that they are all scraps. The one thing that LaVerne has come to understand is that there are no truths beyond this unity.

In this context one might re-evaluate the apparent 'happy endings' of films like *All That Heaven Allows* and *Magnificent Obsession*. At the end of both films, the couple in love are alive and together, although in each case the life of one had been threatened. The apparent happiness should not be given too general a meaning. First of all, it is mitigated by the camera's ending on a shot of deer rather than characters at the end of *All That Heaven Allows*, disrupting any sensual continuity of characters one might have felt in the last scene, and by the whole reason for the end of *Magnificent Obsession*, the fact that it derives from a reflection. Then, too, the last scenes themselves are filled with bright surfaces, keeping the characters two-dimensional. Most important, the patterns of the films do not lead to happy endings in any strictly predetermined way. The fact of the happy endings is seen more as a specific arrangement of the scraps of paper — perhaps not unrelated to the Hollywood studio pressures Sirk had to work with — in which the piece marked 'happiness' just happened to come last on the time scale. Rather than simply being longed for by a character in the middle of the film, some kind of happiness seems to have reached them at the end. But trapped in the surface, or transformed into reindeer, the characters can never really reach anything more real than that scrap of paper with the word 'happiness' written on it.

CREDITS

Production Company: Universal International
Producer: Albert Zugsmith
Production Manager: Tom Shaw
Director: Douglas Sirk
Assistant Director: David Silver
Script: George Zuckerman
From the novel *Pylon* by William Faulkner
Director of Photography: Irving Glassberg (Cinemascope)
Special Effects: Clifford Stine
Editor: Russell F. Shoengarth
Art Directors: Alexander Golitzen, Alfred Sweeney
Set Designers: Russell A. Gausman, Oliver Emert
Music: Frank Skinner, Joseph Gershenson
Costumes: Bill Thomas

Rock Hudson (*Burke Devlin*), Robert Stack (*Roger Shumann*), Dorothy Malone (*LaVerne Shumann*), Jack Carson (*Jiggs*), Robert Middleton (*Matt Ord*), Alan Reed (*Colonel Fineman*), Alexander Lockwood (*Sam Hagood*), Chris Olsen (*Jack Shumann*), Robert J. Wilke (*Hank*), Troy Donahue (*Frank Burnham*).

screen

■ is read by teachers, students, headmasters, university lecturers, critics, scholars, members of film societies, education authorities, teachers' centres — all actively interested in cinema and television.

■ contact them through these pages — ask for details of rates, etc, from

Pam Cook
advertising
screen

81 dean street
london W1V 6AA 01-437 4355

FOCUS ON FILM

Normally we pick up where other magazines leave off. But our Spring issue (no. 6) tackled the familiar subject of JOHN FORD, in a comprehensive survey of this great director's career. William K. Everson writes about his viewings of the 'lost' films in a detailed reappraisal of the silent and early sound period.

Jeffrey Richards provides a penetrating analysis of Ford's films in relation to society and his changing hopes.

Mark Haggard evokes the atmosphere of two personal appearances by Ford in California in a warm portrait of Ford the man.

Plus checklists of writing on Ford and 16 mm availability, and many illustrations.

All this and Tom Milne's review of *Little Big Man*, John Gillett on *Husbands*; feature on the cinemas of Norwood; and career article on Ken Hughes.

Copies 30p from film bookshops or 35p direct from Tantivy Press, 108 New Bond Street, London W1Y 0QX. Please ask for details of our back issues in print.

SCOTTISH INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

From one of the world's trouble spots . . .

The worst housing in Western Europe, steep rise in violent crime, high suicide rates, high unemployment and new industries creating new social patterns. . . . True or false? Check what our reporters, novelists and poets are talking about. 'Civil order will break down.' — Archie Hind. The modern urban nexus destroys metropolitan/provincial distinctions. True? Judge by our writers, Scottish and international: MacCaig, MacLean, Holub, Pasolini, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Edwin Morgan, Stanley Eveling, Tom McGrath, Robert Penn Warren and many others. Our surveys on culture and mass movements spearhead awareness of new cultural patterns for old — and makes for a magazine of great interest to teachers and pupils concerned with the future of society in Britain.

FROM AUGUST we change from quarterly to MONTHLY PUBLICATION

10 times a year, 15p per issue, £1.50 post free per annum, 40 pp min.
SCOTTISH INTERNATIONAL REVIEW, 23 George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LD

Tears and Speed

Jean-Luc Godard on *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*...

I love ostriches. They are realists. They only believe what they see. When everything is going wrong, and the world is getting altogether too ugly, they only have to shut their eyes very tightly for the outside world to just melt away, like the prince overwhelmed by the tenderness of the little laundress in a song by Renoir. In short, ostriches are completely idiotic creatures, and completely charming ones. And if I like 'Le Diable au Corps' it's because it tells the story of two ostriches. And if I also like *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* it is obviously because it's not like Autant-Lara's dreary movie, but the book by that strange man Radiguet. And anyway, why do I like Raymond Radiguet so much? Simply and solely because he did not know he was myopic, and thought everyone saw as dimly as he did, until Cocteau lent him a pair of spectacles.

It must be obvious that I am going to review the latest Douglas Sirk in wildly enthusiastic terms, just because I was thrilled by it. I shall refer back all the time to the ideas and feelings invoked by Radiguet's novel, and to Griffith's *True-Heart Susie* because I think every article on the cinema ought to talk about Griffith; everyone thinks so, and everyone forgets him all the same; Griffith then, and André Bazin, for the same reasons; and now that that's done I'll go back to the comparisons I was making *à propos* of *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*, just stopping for a moment to say that after *Le Plaisir*, it is the most beautiful title in the whole history of the cinema, silent and sound, and also to say that I should like to congratulate Universal-International very loudly for having changed the title of Erich Maria Remarque's book *A Time to Live and a Time to Die*: those dear old universal, international bandits launched Douglas on to a battle circus that Boris Barnet would have loved to film, because it was ten times more infernal and more beautiful than the one Brooks made, or, to put it another way, they gave their

director a wonderful starting-point for a script by replacing 'live' with 'love', implicitly asking 'Ought you to live in order to love, or love in order to live?' — so now before I finally get to the end of my sentence and my comparisons, once more: a time to live and a time to die, no, I'll never get tired of writing those nine, non-divisible, non-subtractable, ever-new words. *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*, everyone must know by now that I am going to talk about this film like one by Old Fritz or Nicholas Ray, like *You Only Live Once* or *They Live by Night*, in short as though John Gavin and Liselotte Pulver were Aucassin and Nicolette created anew in 1959.

Which is what I find magical about Douglas Sirk: this delirious mixture of the middle ages and modernity, of sentimentality and subtlety, of boring compositions and reckless Cinemascope. Anyone can see that you have to talk about this kind of thing like Aragon talked about Elsa's eyes: deliriously, you can be quietly, or passionately delirious, but delirious you have to be, for the logic of delirium is the only logic that Douglas Sirk has ever bothered about. To return to our ostriches. I remember last year seeing a very remarkable little film, set by the sea shore. There was a really quite attractive girl who was playing hide and seek with a chap in and out of the pine trees. He caught up with her at last, and kissed her. It was just what she wanted, but all the same she did not look completely satisfied or happy. 'Why?' the chap asked. The girl stretched out on the warm sand, shutting her eyes. 'Because,' she said, 'I should like to be able to shut my eyes tightly, so tightly that everything would go completely black, really black, completely, but I never manage it.'

That blackness is the subject treated by Douglas Sirk in *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*. I find this film beautiful because it gives me the impression that the two leading characters, Ernest and his Lisbeth, with their gentle Preminger-like faces, manage, by shutting their eyes with a kind of passionate innocence to the bombs falling around them in Berlin to get deeper into themselves than any other characters in a film before them. As Rossellini said, in this issue of the magazine, it is through the war that they rediscover love. They rediscover each other, thanks to Hitler, man and woman whom God created. It is because one must love in order to live, that one must live in order to love, Ernest seems to be saying to us as he kills a Russian woman partisan. Elizabeth, sipping her champagne, seems to be saying the same thing. Love must be leisurely, says Sirk with them, in every frame, paying homage to Baudelaire: love then, and die. And his film is beautiful because we think of war as the images of love pass before our eyes, and vice-versa.

People will argue that this is a simplistic idea. Perhaps, because after all it is a producer's idea. But it needed a director to make something of it,

and rediscover the truth (pleasure) behind the convention (tears). Milestone could not do it long ago, Philip Dunne has just failed dismally to do it now. But unlike that pedestrian pedagogue at Fox, Douglas Sirk is an *honest* director, in the classic sense of the term. His straightforward ingenuousness is his strength. Technically speaking, it is in this sense that I find his film beautiful. Because I have the impression that the images last twice as long as those of ordinary films, a twenty-fourth of a second instead of a forty-eighth, as if he was remembering his days as an editor at UFA, and as if, out of respect for his characters, he was trying to make use of even the time when the shutter was closed. Of course Sirk was not so explicit about it as I have been. But he gives the impression of having had that idea. Perhaps it is an ingenuous idea for a film-maker to want to assimilate the definition of the cinema to his definition of his characters, but it is a beautiful idea. When we talk about 'getting inside a character's skin', basically we mean just that. Taken all in all, it is as beautiful and ingenuous as Gance throwing his camera in the air when the boy Napoleon is throwing snowballs in the yard at Brienne.

The important thing, as Douglas Sirk proves, is to believe in what you are doing by making the audience believe in it. *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* goes even farther in this direction than *Tarnished Angels*, *Written on the Wind* and *Captain Lightfoot*. They are not great films but it doesn't matter, because they are beautiful. And why are they beautiful? Firstly, as we have seen, because the script is beautiful. Secondly, because the actors are not ugly, to say the least. Thirdly, because the direction isn't, either. *A Time to Die* proves it once again.

Before talking about the form of the film, let's talk briefly about Lise-lotte Pulver's. Nobody seems to like it but me. You say she's skinny. But it was war time! and the subject is not: Lise, take off your sweater. And for my part, I never believed so much that I was watching a real German girl at the time of the collapse of the Third Reich as I did watching Lise-lotte Pulver (and yet she's from Zurich), jumping nervously at every new shot. Let's go further. I never believed so much that I was in Germany in war time as I did watching *A Time to Die* though it is an American film made in peace time. Sirk can make us see things so closely that we can touch them, breathe them. Aldrich did it in *Attack*, but Sirk does it better. The frozen face of a dead man on the Russian Front, the bottles of wine, a brand new flat in a ruined town, we believe in them as though they had been filmed by a reporter's Cameflex, not a great Cinemascope camera manipulated by what must be called the hand of a master.

It is fashionable today to sneer at the wide screen. Not with me. I should like to take this opportunity of telling René Unclear-Clair and all others

of the same persuasion, very politely, that they are talking through their hats. It suffices to have seen the two latest Douglas Sirk to be convinced that Cinemascope is as much an improvement on normal format as it is an enlargement on it. It has to be admitted that our old film director has recovered his youthful powers, and is beating all the young directors on their own ground, panorama-ing anywhere and everywhere, moving in and out on the action with equally reckless abandon. And the astonishingly beautiful thing about these camera movements, which gather steam like an engine, and are so swiftly executed that you can't see the blur,* is that they give the impression of having been done by hand, when in fact they were done with a crane, rather as if the swooping, swirling lines of someone like Fragonard had been done by complicated machinery. Conclusion: those who did not see or like Liselotte Pulver running on the bank of — was it the Rhine or the Danube? it doesn't really matter which it was or how it was — ducking under a gate and straightening up on the other side all in one agile movement, and did not see at the same time Douglas's big Mitchell camera also duck and straighten with exactly the same supple-jointed down-and-up, either didn't see anything, or do not know what is beautiful.

* When the camera pans the landscape automatically looks blurred. Sirk intelligently masks the blurred effect by having people running all round the ones he is following, suppressing the disadvantages of speed by going even faster.

Translation by Susan Bennett

First published in Cahiers du Cinéma April 1959, and reprinted with permission of the Editor.

The First Legion:

Vision and perception in Sirk

Dave Grosz

I

The style of a film-maker, like that of any consistent artist constitutes the materialisation of a vision. That is, the form which shapes his art carries with it the implication of a certain content, one apart from, although often closely related to the work's ostensible 'subject', and which is unique to the individual artist. Style in film, a medium of visual expression, is itself a visual phenomenon; a work of film art consists of an imposition of a specific order on the visual world so as to convey meaning. It seems quite natural, then, to distinguish a particular class of films, those whose meaning is above all concerned with visual perception itself, a meaning directly connected with its own mode of representation.

Since this notion must be somewhat hazy, it can best be served by a more concrete discussion. Any analysis of art can never be an end in itself, and is of necessity a reduction of huge proportions. If it is used as an indication toward a fuller intuitive understanding, then it has served its purpose; if it fails in this task, it should be summarily tossed aside. In dealing with criticism in any way, it is essential not to lose sight of this aim.

The films of Douglas Sirk, some of the most sublime and deeply felt in American cinema, are rooted in a self-analytic visual style. This must be at the centre of any discussion of Sirk's work.

If physical vision is considered in terms of the stand it takes on its own characteristic means of expression, it is important to think of the basic relationship of viewer to film. There are important but subtle differences between what is being expressed on the screen at a given moment and the wholeness of the viewer's perception of the screen at that moment; the difference, that is, between the director's 'vision', his sense of form, and the human process by which this form is communicated. What is to

be made, then, of a film whose very subject *is* the perceptual process? Is it possible for such an inherently reflective expression to be meaningful, or must its essence be lost in transmission? The isolation of the experience of looking at a movie screen permits the concentration necessary to distinguish between an abstract representation of perception and one's own physical demands. For certain purposes, of course, the two can be manipulated by the artist so as to make them coincide. Art depends for its power on the creation of its own context, a world in which only expressed form exists.

Sirk's scripts are often marked by characters' attempts to come to peace with themselves by escaping from the unsatisfactory environments in which they exist. In *There's Always Tomorrow* the main character is caught up in a typical bourgeois life, tied to work and family. His 'confinement' does not become oppressive, however, until he is by chance placed in a situation where a possibility for escape presents itself; he had previously accepted his lot with little question. His opportunity comes with the visit of an adolescent sweetheart who now inhabits a different, and to him therefore, desirable, world. But he is unable to leave with her, and returns to his old ways, having glimpsed 'happiness'. That this end is inevitable, inherent in the 'world', is a principal theme in Sirk's films. Its larger implications are forcefully expressed in his visual style.

In an interview in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Sirk asserts that '*everything, even life, inevitably slips away from you: you cannot grasp, cannot touch the impression, you can only reach its reflections. If you try to grasp happiness itself, your fingers only meet a surface of glass, because happiness has no existence of its own, and probably exists only inside yourself.*'¹ Here, Sirk has hit upon a most apt metaphor for his own style. His frames are flat, 'surfaces of glass' which in themselves constitute the ultimate constraint on his characters' actions; they are trapped within these surfaces, and any attempt at release only makes the impossibility of doing so more apparent. Occasionally, this metaphor becomes, in retrospect, almost self-consciously literal. In *A Time to Love and A Time to Die*, when the newly-married woman sees her soldier husband depart for the front, she stands outside a glass enclosure, unable to 'grasp or touch' him. Shortly thereafter, when he is shot down in his camp, he dies trying to hold on to his wife's letter which contains her hopes, and his own for the future. The letter slowly drifts out of reach in a glass-like puddle.

'Surface' can have a variety of meanings in connection with film. The term can be associated with directors as disparate as Sirk and Chabrol; it is how the surface is visually brought about, and what function it assumes that are the crucial factors.

Depth in Sirk's films is not truncated by physical positioning of objects on the set, nor collapsed by the use of long lenses. Rather, flatness is asserted through the process by which he has the audience view his arrangements of objects, his 'visual field'.

Any frame can arbitrarily be separated into *physical* foreground and background components, simply on the basis of what we can discern as relative distances of the various regions of the camera. This is not to say that Sirk's images are necessarily constructed in this way, but it provides a starting point for an analysis of them. Sirk consistently uses 'backgrounds' which, for one reason or another, attract attention, and cause the audience to try to focus on them. At times, with striking emotional effect, he places a character in the frame who tries to perform this same act, and who thus identifies this act in the audience more strongly than otherwise. There are many such occurrences in *The First Legion*; others include the eavesdropping scenes in *The Lady Pays Off* and *There's Always Tomorrow*, and the end of the wake in *The Tarnished Angels*. Sirk, then, plays on audience perceptual instincts, but with what result? It is as if one were to walk toward a distant scene in which objects were intermingled with each other so that, as far as location is concerned, they are indistinguishable. With some movement forward, although the parts might not yet be distinct, a certain tension becomes evident, an expectation of contact is still not visible. The perception itself eventually becomes a kind of deduction from that expectation.

The structure of Sirk's frames operates on an analogous level. Instead of physical movement, there is the visual movement of the effort to 'see' the background which supplies a continuous and progressive impetus. But since no actual change in position is involved, the background takes on a prominence which forces a perceptual merger with the foreground. All this takes place in a very short time, and the situation is quickly stabilised, with the two parts having more or less equal importance at any given time. Their convergence invokes a tension which sustains the *dynamic* of flatness. Although this tension is posited by Sirk as a precondition for perception in his world, the surface it creates finally acts as an impossible obstacle to *any* vision — one of Sirk's most telling ironies. The impossibility of emotional fulfilment for the characters is transformed into the impossibility of perceptual 'success' which, in the end, becomes the *reason* behind the script analogue. Content is brought into being as a consequence of flow of form.

Along with perceptual merger is another vital ingredient of Sirk's frames.

I believe that art must establish distances, and I've been astonished in seeing my films again at the number of times I used mirrors, for they are the symbols of that distance. For quasi-mystical reasons, mirrors exercise a strange fascination over me. . . . I love to give these faraway impressions, so faint that one has the feeling that they've been filtered.²

And indeed he does use mirrors; in fact, some of his films are crucially dependent on them for their meaning. In *All That Heaven Allows* and *Imitation of Life* they are frequently employed to demonstrate the irreconcilable distances and separations of the characters from one another. But the actual appearance of mirrors in certain scenes represents only a dramatic execution of a larger purpose. In many of Sirk's frames, all the objects become, in effect, mirrors reflecting each other. Here, the field of objects as a whole takes on critical value as the constituting force of the image. Characters are either utterly subordinated to the objects and have their actions proscribed by them, or have meaning only as objects themselves. *The Tarnished Angels* is the most total achievement of this aspect of style. The carnival rides, the airplanes and pylons, the papers scattered on the newsroom floor, generate from the outside point of view infinite repetitions of themselves. Crowding becomes an inescapable entailment of the existence of objects. Each object is equivalent to the others in the sense that to be in the position of one is to perceive mirror images of it, schematically represented by the next.

This is an abstract formulation of the problem that appears to all Sirkian characters, exhibiting itself under a number of guises, the most common of which is the quest for happiness. What seems to them as happiness, however, always proves to be a deceptive and false image of it. For the viewer, the abstract and the specific versions exist simultaneously and almost independently. Their themes are contrapuntal and run throughout a film, but it is by way of their relation that meaning is bestowed. The end result for the characters is shatteringly clear; happiness does exist, '... if only by the simple fact that it can be destroyed',² but in all cases, the destruction is inevitable, no matter how overwhelming the hope raised. The application of this to the perceptual analogy suggests that truly coherent perception is not possible. It is as if Sirk were holding up the notion of inherent expectation as the only means toward true vision, and then exploding it internally — the unavoidable mirror reflections. Happiness is held up and then demolished as a visible concept. To be happy is to confront one's happiness, and such a confrontation cannot last.

Sirk himself seems to accept this analogy:

I have always been intrigued by the problems of blindness. One of my dearest projects was to make a film which takes place in an asylum for the blind. It would only have people constantly groping, trying to grasp things they can't see. What seems very interesting to me is to try to confront problems of this order through a means of expression — the cinema — which only deals with things that can be seen.³

The metaphor of blindness applies to all of Sirk's characters. The structure of the frames as perceptual expectations makes clear vision

impossible. Sight is blocked by objects and by their mirror reflections; the surface of the frame is the ultimate barrier to sight and thus to feeling. It represents the consciousness of the characters in its mirage-like aspect, and, in its structural aspect, the objective conditions which prevent any real breakthrough. The most disarming experience for characters and audience are the realisations of the simultaneous closeness and distance of this barrier, as in *There's Always Tomorrow*, when the frustrated husband looks up and sees the airplane which he knows carries away his one chance of happiness. The flatness of this image implies both his sight and his blindness: the vision seems clear, but his understanding of it leads to the experience of the *inability* to see, a state graphically presented as he runs into the street, lost amidst the rain and hurtling automobiles. His visual context *seems* to have been shifted, but even this is revealed as illusion.

'*Things which endure can have a certain beauty in themselves, but they don't have that strange force which only manifests itself at certain moments.*'⁴ The 'certain moments' he refers to are the impersonal, powerful confrontations that occur without warning in some of his films, such as the tracking shot into the television set in *All That Heaven Allows* and the mask bursting into the room in *The Tarnished Angels*. The latter example is of particular interest here, for it takes place at a moment when happiness for two of the characters seems almost achieved. The event physically ruins this possibility and asserts the qualities of surface and falseness we associate with a mask. The incident can be extended to the perceptual analogy, since it eliminates the viewer's hope for an orderly field of vision. It creates an awareness of the erratic possibilities of the perceptual expectation moulded by Sirk. If usual expectations cannot be relied upon, the basis of perception is badly shaken beyond repair. Although the audience is assured that the immediate force behind the event does not endure, the fact of its existence defines the end of the mirage of happiness.

• II

The First Legion is Sirk's first unquestionable masterwork.⁵ In some ways, its construction and compass are simpler than in his most mature films, but the peculiar aesthetic force it possesses is clear. Its script is his most extensive in terms of its dealings with the workings of organised religion, but this general category is by no means foreign to Sirk. It is in *Thunder on the Hill*, *Take Me to Town*, *Magnificent Obsession*, and *Battle Hymn*, and in a more diffuse way in virtually all of his other films. '*The First Legion*,' says Sirk, '*is a try at fusing the melodramatic and the religious film. The problems of religion have always excited me, even though I'm not a believer, . . . and are one of my constant preoccupations.*'

The script is concerned primarily with the nature of faith, its relationship to and effect on the individual believer and 'the masses', with a sharp distinction made between the two. Sirk's shooting transforms the abstract notion of faith into a relatively well-defined, yet still elusive, form. The stylisation of faith becomes an ominous outside force, internal to neither individuals nor groups, which looms as a possibility, and via belief, as the reality of control over human action. While this possibility always *seems* to exist, its inherent impossibility is made progressively more explicit during the course of the film.

A characteristic visual theme of *The First Legion* is the overpowering dominance of single objects within frames. This is developed in Sirk's cyclical manner; not to say that it ends up in the same place in which it started, but that the thread of the theme is slowly unwound and carefully shaped into loops. The eventual result is foreshadowed, though not fully stated, by what precedes it. The film opens with an upward angle shot of the seminary tower, an initial injection into our awareness of the dominating character of objects. This first shot is so terrifyingly plain in this regard, that what follows must be considered under its immediate influence. Moreover, this bestowed 'property' of objects is here, at the first possible moment, identified with the very physical entity within which the bulk of the action is confined. The realisation of this fact is not abrupt, but the power contained within this shot is gradually released, and at the same time combined with that of individual images which appear later. In this sense it exerts a force on the other parts of the film, as well as within itself, another notion particular to *The First Legion*:

In the ensuing scene, the extent of object-dominance is sharply reduced in degree, but does remain. Here, it is used in direct relationship with certain characters, Father Fulton and Monsignor Carey. Dominance over these figures is achieved by the influence of the tower and its objectifying 'gaze', and by the peculiar bush which persists throughout this scene. The way the bush is photographed, the flatness, the cutting, removes the possibility of life from it, an especially striking irony in this case because of the normal tendency to associate with such plants only the most benign qualities of nature. This metaphor is used consistently by Sirk in most of his films, and very much in *The First Legion*. The bush is seen brushed by the wind in its *organic* being, but as such, unchanged in basic visual form and function. This mode does nothing to enhance its power.

Thus, the bush plays a dual and contradictory role, in the embodiment of power in its being as an object, and of powerlessness as a natural organism; an initial suggestion that perhaps it is not a bush at all, but has become something entirely different. This possibility is developed

continuously. The two characters here are utterly unaware of the strange interaction of forces that is occurring, attested to by the inanity of the dialogue in the scene. The lack of attempt at comprehension on their part places a gap between them and the surrounding objects. This relationship is not quite 'domination', since there can be no defeat before a problem is even tackled, but there is the suggestion that the characteristic of 'consciousness' or 'awareness' is one more attainable to objects than to people. That is to say, just when Sirk has removed the significance of biological life from an object such as a bush, he has endowed it with a 'presence' which gives it a power complementing that of its sheer existence. At this point, the relationship between the two is by no means clear, but by the end of the film there is much more to be said about it.

The intensity with which the domination theme is expressed early in the film is increased in the succeeding insert, consisting of a pan across leaves to the tower and the seminary. It provides a necessary connection between two previous shots. The lifelessness of the leaves and the lack of force of the 'gentle breeze' are put forward very strongly in a grotesque soft-focus image. The leaves are directly abstracted from the bush seen immediately before, with these crucial qualities made not only more evident, but in fact, the entire subject of the frame. Moreover, by being crowded closely to the surface, their 'presence' is total, not merely schematic. Since it would have been inappropriate for this high point to be prolonged, the leaves appear only fleetingly. The camera movement carries past them to the tower, and the mysterious dominating effect of the leaves is directly linked to the power held by the building. Thus, the ambiguity that had been previously present in the image of the tower is partially resolved, as it becomes related to the characters through the medium of the leaves. This pan demonstrates well the flatness of Sirk's frames. But it is precisely the illusion of depth which Sirk takes hold of and destroys, for the shot gives only similarity in the depth of the leaves and the tower with respect to the frame. They are both pushed close to the surface and remain confined there.

This idea is continued after the cut to Father Fulton's class. The floor of the classroom slopes up and makes the entire image tend to merge with the surface of the frame, albeit incompletely. This kind of dynamic flatness is basic to Sirkian visual development. It should be noted that the class image is the first time that a mass of people plays a part in the film. The orderly arrangement of the members of the class is essential to the structure of this shot. The role they play here is completely passive. Their very pigeon-holing, the fact that they are locked in their places attests to this; but more important is their situation, their reason for being where they are. As a group, they are concentrating on receiving

information through their senses, in particular by looking toward the front of the room. The inactive nature of this process is emphasised by their being photographed from the back of the room instead of the front. They are not unearthing anything 'new', but merely exercising their senses in order to make out more clearly what is before them, made into a metaphor by the blackboard writing. Although this is not in the strict sense an activity, there is a very definite *tension* associated with it, only evident when it is broken by the entrance of Father Fulton into the room. It becomes clear then that it was *his* presence that the class was trying to bring into being; it is only his presence that can fulfil their (and our) visual expectations. This scene is preliminary to the further elaboration of the theme.

One of the major lines of dramatic development begins in the scene in Father Fulton's quarters — his and Father Rawleigh's discontent with living the way they do, and their desire to leave the seminary. This discontent can be seen as a vague feeling of conflict with their current environment, of seeming not 'at home'. Their uneasiness, too, sets up a considerable tension, on a script level, in the social relationships of the two priests with the other members of the seminary; but more importantly, in the shooting itself. Fulton says that he must 'get away'. His room is sparsely furnished, with blank walls. The characters are completely confined, both physically in the room and visually in the frame. The walls bear witness to their being set into the plane of the frame. This visual process is not static. Its most important feature is the tension in the dynamic interplay between the parts of the frame, which does not deny its unity. The characters are not really close together. Their personal conversation is sharply counteracted by the separation implied by the cutting. Fulton and Rawleigh want, even need, to escape, but of course they cannot. The window in the room almost mocks them, with its false promise of the outside and 'freedom'. For Sirk, there is no outside. His characters, here the two priests, inevitably believe that there must be. Their lack of basic comprehension of the nature of the 'world', and their necessarily vain attempts to gain it, is at the root of the tension.

Following this scene, the 'Blessed Joseph' statue appears for the first time, in an insert with the ill Father Sierra. As Dr Morell and Father Arnoux emerge from his room, the statue hangs over them. Although physically it occupies only a small part of the frame, there can be no doubt that it is the motive force. Again there is a single object in control, endowed with a presence which determines the arrangement of the frame as a whole. The doctor and the priest talk idly under it, aware of its existence and perhaps even of its mystery, but not of its peculiar endowments and relevance to them. They walk slowly down the hall, closed in by its narrow walls, a good example of Sirk's 'visual field'.

The characters are photographed from behind; in effect, they are blind, aimlessly walking into the distance, but their presumed region of sight is contained by the audience. The frame is a schematic representation of visual expectation. Only the tension is present, there is no start toward its fulfilment. At the far end of the hall, people walk across the gap, unseen by characters who do not even see them, but forming the beginnings of a potential materialisation. That other end of the hallway is the dominant element at this point. It is there that the audience looks to try to force, by its gaze, the disunity of what is there into a solid form, for it is difficult to live with the tension alone. At the same time, the characters in the relative foreground are in the field of vision of the audience, and thereby contribute to any expectation of a release of that tension but the audience is aware as well of the characters' unawareness. Thus, the situation is highly ambiguous, more so even than a normal act of vision, due to the various simultaneous levels on which Sirk presents his subject.

Ominous signs precede the development toward the first dramatic breakthrough of the film. Various aspects are shown of the chapel, the courtyard, the orchestra, the choir, as well as a downward shot of the arch. All of these, and particularly the latter, build up the idea of control by one image of its successors. They constitute a background upon which events will occur, and which will allow them to take the form that they do. For example, immediately after the insert, Father Fulton packs to leave. Even before anything happens, he has already been confined by the effect of the preceding shots. In fact, the insert can be thought of as an externalisation of his thoughts at the time. As such, they are ambiguous enough to allow a belief that his escape is really possible, while at the same time confirming the existence of doubt in his mind. But this kind of psychological representation, while useful up to a point, does not remain valid long. The formal structure of the scene makes the chapel extend up to Fulton, a surface against which he is thrown, rather than a figment of the internal wanderings of his imagination, primarily as a result of the scene's sharp cutting; it is no dreamlike affair. Nevertheless, it is not inconsistent to include the idea of doubt in what follows: the room in which Fulton is packing is completely flat, the lighting is diffuse and casts a ghostly silhouette on the wall. The priest is blind even to this confrontation with his own image, but the shadow itself is not. It relentlessly drives his actions, and points up strongly the impossibility of escape. The room is filled at once with uncertain, resolute struggle and the ever-present but unresolved substantiality of failure.

These uneasy circumstances might at first seem to be in contrast with the shot of the common room that follows. The composition appears to be placid and neatly balanced. But soon, what had filled Fulton's rooms fills

this one as well. Its atmosphere is dark. The objects in the unpopulated room form mirrors for each other. After a shot of priests coming out of the altar, Sirk cuts back to the common room. This is the point at which the frightening force of the altar is introduced. The power it exerts over the priests here is total; they are utterly within its control from the outside viewpoint. Now the objects in the common room, particularly the chairs and lamps, take on an added force; they dominate the space given them. In doing so, they tend almost to change the shape of the room, or at least to shatter any illusion of depth connected with it.

The scene in Father Sierra's room is something of a variation of that in Father Fulton's. Its overall effect is both more serene and more intense. There is no vigorous personal activity, and in fact Fulton is in a far different state of mind than he had just been in, in his farewell to his apparently dying friend. However, instead of one, there are several people. The white walls serve the same function as they had before, but now they faithfully record the frantic shadows moving about. The geometry of the frame, too, is constant, though seeming more strained in its effort to repress depth. Any expectation of a relaxation of this strain when Fulton turns and exits from the room is wiped out as the camera determinedly tracks in to the Joseph statue. Since this is a point where a personal decision to flee an oppressive environment seems to have been made and carried out, it is appropriate that it be made clear where the true power for allowing such decisions resides. This is not to imply the imparting of any special power to a religious object *per se*, but to individual objects in general. In fact, the possibility of just such a misjudgment makes Sirk's use of an object with connotations of religious content all the more convincing. The realisation of its 'higher' role commands the audience to assume a new stand in its previous associations, and form a new fabric of expectation.

The next scene, that of the first 'miracle', is a masterpiece of exposition, bringing together many trends, removing certain lingering doubts, only to replace them with new and more perplexing ones. The scene takes place in a very large room, presumably mostly open space. This observation is denied immediately by the 'cutter' of objects which fills the room — a movie projector and screen aside from what is normally there. The screen itself is huge, and what it shows, a 'world' (here, the sights of India) compressed into a flat surface, is a caricature of the world actually presented by Sirk. It takes its place with the rest of the furniture. Some of the priests are seated next to the projector, with the machine on the right. This unbalanced arrangement is another step in the single-object domination theme. In this position one of the priests asks another, 'What do you know about living?', a question applicable, certainly, to seminaries, but one which assumes a highly sarcastic tone

when transposed into the Sirkian scheme. Physically, the idea of the projector-screen set up is perfect for Sirk's purposes. A group of people in the back of a room is concentrating on an attempt to see what is going on in front of them. The cutting separates the two regions of the room from one another, and reduces each to a flat surface. From the beginning we know that this attempt to see, in the largest sense, is doomed to failure. The very existence of the two objects which give promise to the priests' expressed desire is just what precludes the possibility of its fulfilment. And the desire to see, above all others, is crucial to Sirk. If, within his framework, he can eliminate any hope for this, he has accomplished much. Seeing, in the specifically physical sense in this scene, is only a metaphor for what the general construction of his frames implies. There is no doubt, though, that Sirk's use of an expressive climax at a point of convergence of the two levels is particularly effective. And it is part of a highly consistent pattern that runs through the whole of *The First Legion* and, for that matter, much of the rest of his work.

The screen is bordered on the left by a railing and a staircase coming down from the priests' living quarters. The room darkens and the projection of the film is begun. Almost immediately, before any sense can be made of the movie, Father Sierra, who had long been in a coma, walks along the rail and begins to descend the stairs. The complexity of this situation is formidable. A 'miracle' is occurring, one which we soon learn is the 'result' of prayer to Blessed Joseph. A miracle like this is a supreme achievement of a personal aspiration, the consequence solely of the exercise of will upon a divine being to have him intervene at a particular time. No physical effort or interpersonal relation is necessary. The idea of the miracle is the most clean-cut example of what is most inimical to Sirk's view of the world as it has developed so far. This in itself is startling enough, but it is not by any means a complete description of the event. The priests have every intention of looking at the film, but when Father Sierra appears, this becomes impossible. At this moment, they cannot coherently direct their vision. When the room is dark, not only do they wish to see the movie, but the screen is virtually the only object towards which the priests can bring their attention, simply because of the size of the screen and its luminous quality. However, even these reasons fade when their colleague steps out of his room. This event, especially incredible to them, certainly diverts their attention but does not redirect it right away. For a while, their field of vision is in a state of utter confusion; their sense reception cannot be meaningfully organised. What is actually seen on the screen is an elegant schematisation of this experience. To some extent, the audience shares their feeling, for the same psychological motives, but an attempt at direct reproduction at second hand of these feelings is not the central issue; but rather the need to reconcile this instantaneously created knot of 'con-

tradition' and carry it into the meaning of the film.

Thematic disbelief mirrors visual disorientation. After Sirk cuts away from his 'establishing' long shot, the resolution of this situation begins. Fathers Arnoux and Fulton are dominated by the overhanging stairs. The latter's position is now very ambiguous; he wants to leave, but has just witnessed a miracle whose object was to prevent him from satisfying that wish. In this, it succeeds, and his situation is frozen. From this two-shot, Sirk goes to a pan across the wall to the piano, a dominating object pinned to the surface and surrounded only by space. The next cut is to an insert of the same tower which appeared before. The progression, then, proceeds from confusion to its frustrating effect on a character to a potentially foreboding object-space tension to an image of supreme power and devastation, all within the surface of the frame.

The script of the following section of *The First Legion* is concerned with the aftermath of the first miracle, and especially its effect on the crippled girl, Terry Gilmartin. The most immediate result of the strange event is that large crowds are drawn to the seminary by the hope for a personal miracle. These masses of people are photographed in such a way as to interweave with the shrubbery outside the seminary. The plane of the frame seems to be tilted in its effort to lie completely on the surface. The bushes here do not have quite the same one-sided force that they took on in the first scene, because, visually, they are at equilibrium with the crowd formations. The two act on each other to dehumanise those in the crowd, a step toward recognition of the failure of the 'miracle'. The idea of the crowd image pushing toward the surface is emphasised in a short scene of two priests looking at the people, the cutting between the priests and the crowd tending to place a great distance between them. Moreover, Sirk never inserts a medium shot or close-up of the crowd here, but always holds a long shot. He thus sets up a tension between the two regions, and gives it dynamic by the priests' act of vision in trying to make out the details of what is happening below. It is made clear that no consistent arrangement becomes apparent to them. Their field of vision is forced to remain trapped between chaos and order.

Into this environment is placed the character of Terry, first seen enclosed inside a pickup truck, with trees behind her and flowers in front. Her physical disability is explicit, and in this respect, she differs from the others, who presumably *can* act, but are held back for psychological reasons transformed into visual statements in the context of the film.

The entry of Dr Morell at this point marks the beginning of the reaction to his staging of the miracle at the seminary. His emotion at seeing Terry brought there along with the crowds is a mixture of jealousy and inverted anger. The pettiness of these feelings mingles harshly with the

overwhelming falseness of the environment created by the arrangement of trees and flowers in which the action proceeds as the doctor forcibly removes Terry and drives her home. The image of the car entering the right part of the frame, with Terry's frame house and a tree on the centre left sets up a state of continuously evolving balance, with the overall effect of a new tension at the surface, which from the beginning changes an apparently peaceful setting into something far different. Sirk develops the setting in a cut to the porch of the house. The architecture of the porch, with its columns at the left and slatted roof above, is long and rectangular in shape — strikingly similar to the hall on the second floor of the seminary. Conflict in the frame is also somewhat similar in form to that seen in the hall, though different in content. Trees in soft-focus waving in the background mock the maid's words on the relationship of people to religion. They become by far the dominant force in the frame; yet remain out of focus. Thus, the background is brought up to the surface and serves as a representation of a visual field, one in which the outside imposition of order (sharp focus) is impossible. Dr Morell's efforts are directed toward 'protecting' Terry from the vagaries and corrupting influences of the world. Placed in counterpoint against this line is the pattern of cutting Sirk introduces which flows directly from his shot along the porch. He alternates between the doctor and Terry, dominated respectively by trees and flowers. At once he emphasises their separation, precludes the possibility of vision bridging the gap, and places them on the same surface, implying that neither has the power to break out of it. Morell's reasons for putting on the 'miracle' fade while Terry's faith in it increases; all the while, however, the overriding factor is the falseness both of the miracle and the faith it inspired, no matter how real either may seem at any time.

At the end of this scene is a remarkable climax. As the doctor drives off, the camera is away from the house, pointing towards it; leaves move with the wind, creating a kind of undulating wall. Sirk then cuts to a point-of-view shot from Terry on the porch — a long shot, with nothing in the foreground, but far away is a hill with a cross of a church visible on it, overlaid by black sky. The background has completely enveloped the frame, and it is absolutely flat. The image as a whole is put in a position of telling dominance, especially with respect to Terry. Her faith in the miracle is mirrored by her ability to detect the cross in the distance. But for her, that distance is infinite, on one level because of her crippled legs, but more importantly, because of the placement of the cross in such a surface of falseness. Its power derives from its falseness, not from its religious significance, and thus is not a power that dispenses miracles but one which guarantees their impossibility and utter unreality. The distance of the cross also implies that it is unreachable. It is located in a field just over the border of the visible, which gives a promise of

vision, but in the end underscores its futility. It seems to accord great hope of gaining the outside, much more hope than, for example, the window in Father Fulton's room gave to the two priests. As a result, the inevitability of failure becomes the more acutely felt.

The photography of Morell's office transforms it into a self-contained visual entity. The unbalanced arrangement of objects, the x-ray picture and diplomas on the wall, the lamp in the foreground add up to a sensation of imprisonment, which tends to compress space by forcing it into defined regions between objects. This effect makes each object representative of all others while retaining its individual characteristics. Arnoux' remark as he discusses the doctor's plan, 'There is a heavier hand over you now', is more than apt, and puts him in a position of at least superficial comprehension of some of the forces at work, the first such direct sign in the film. Any illusion that his understanding has true depth is lost, however, when a bereaved mother demands to know why her son is dead. The power of the surrounding objects denies her and everyone else the chance of ever getting beyond them to come to 'real' knowledge of the world. In the mother's case, that realisation would allow her nothing to live for. Her only 'hope' is to remain ignorant.

When Terry's mother summons the doctor, the frame quite immobilises her; the predominant lines in it confine her in its plane. On the other hand, the artificial flowers on the telephone table and the stairs in the background push toward each other, since the line of sight is directed toward the background, making movement *in depth* equally out of the question. The abstractness of this kind of surface construction is dissolved in the cut to Morell ringing the doorbell. Tonalities of gray here make him virtually at one with the surface of the door. But even this surface is partially dominated by the oppressiveness of the flowers on the right side of the image. As the doctor enters the house and walks through it, Sirk holds a long shot, unifying the space in the character's movement from foreground to background, with the staircase the dominating element. By the end of the shot, the stairs seems to swallow him when he disappears behind them, but the tension that had pervaded just before remains, even lacking now its catalyst.

The scene in Terry's room is very much like the last one in Morell's office, she is surrounded above by the many pictures on her wall. For her at this time, the material unavoidable surface of the wall has replaced the diffuseness of the sky. The characters in the room are visibly separated from one another, yet woven into a single texture by the lamp and pictures which effectively prevent meaningful communication. This is perhaps understood best by Terry; her goal is beyond any of the others: 'I want the impossible to happen,' she says. Her faith lies in an idealisation of the false miracle presented by Morell, and as such, transcends it.

But it cannot transcend the objects, the surfaces, the textures of her environment. Her vision can proceed only so far before being shattered and rendered incoherent by the harshness of what surrounds her. In this sense, she has progressed no farther in her quest than Morell or her mother have in their more limited ones, the primary distinction being that it is much more difficult for her to learn the meaning of her failure.

The tone of the film becomes markedly darker when Morell comes to the seminary to see Father Arnoux. Sirk holds a static shot of the lobby as a 'brother' answers the door. A Blessed Joseph statue dominates the space and continues to do so when he comes into the lobby. The high camera angle imparts to the object an ominous force which blends well with the dark tonalities. Morell enters and walks quickly through the lobby. The common room he then walks through is so changed in atmosphere as to be barely recognisable as the same room shown several times before. The degree of order contained in the arrangement of objects seems to have increased greatly, and with it, the interlocking forces of tension among them. This fact directly affects our perception of the room. Most of the objects are relatively distant from the camera, and, in our visual effort to resolve the tension, the overall view of the room is brought forward and molded on to the surface. As Morell enters the chapel, we see first the altar illuminated with 'an unearthly glow, another step in the cyclical emergence of the power of the altar. When the doctor sees Father Arnoux in a confessional, they are both almost completely closed in by the dark walls, and the entire shot is dominated by the altar in the corner of the frame. During their conversation, the doctor reveals his concoction of Father Sierra's 'miracle'. The strange cutting here is very intense, placing Morell entirely in darkness, and Arnoux before the altar, a 'wall' between them realised physically by the confessional. The meaning of their discourse is minimal, since the 'solution' of the miracle had been implicitly known all along by all except those who depended directly on its truth, Terry and the rector particularly. More important, however, is the beginning of the audience's realisation of the power being assumed by the altar. In its presence, the meaning of events is modified drastically. Its visual impact is also striking. Although, in this scene, its illumination is strong, the fact that attention is directed toward it reduces detailed resolution in the rest of the frame, which, becoming marginal to it, affects the perception of it, instead of the other way around.

The common room of the seminary provides the location for the sequel. The rector asks Arnoux to represent his case for the sanctification of the Blessed Joseph. The priest, knowing that the miracle is a lie, refuses. The two are alone in the room, separated from each other by objects and walls. In the montage, Arnoux is placed in front of a soft-focus back-

ground, spreading the tension in the frame; the background has become the dominating force, overriding the character. In the confrontation between the two men, Arnoux walks away into the background, the image shared equally with a lamp on the left side. This is the only point at which Arnoux attempts truly independent action, his dedication presumably being to his ideals as a Jesuit. But yet, he cannot break away from the surface-object domination characteristic of the frames. His visual confinement is followed quickly by a physical end to his plans. The camera tracks in to the rector as he falls unconscious. Here, after the interaction of the forces and the failure of the exercise of personal decision by both men, Sirk cuts to the tower insert, and the tolling of bells. Once more, the frame reverts to an image of domination over characters. In some ways, this acts as a summary of past events: no progress toward the realisation of individual goals has been made, in fact, every attempt in this direction, with the temporary exception of Terry's, has been foiled.

Following the insert, are shown the immediate effects of the demise of the rector. There is a dark overhead shot of priests, dominated by a bright lamp. Such a brilliantly-lit object tends to take precedence in perception, assumes a central position in the flattening of the frame, and becomes the starting point for the interpretation of other objects in the frame. Sirk cuts to another dark shot of the doctor in front of a background of stained glass, into which Arnoux also moves. The stained glass remains the dominant force as they walk toward it. A medium long two-shot of balanced tensions with Arnoux in the left background and Morell in the right foreground follows, and is the precursor of several similar shots in the scene. There is a close shot of the dying rector, dominated by a pillar, intercut with one of overlooking priests, aligned on the surface by the stairs and the wall. The lighting on the faces of the priests suggests successive reflections of the same form, preserving the general flatness of the frames at the end of the scene.

The idea of reflection becomes more intense in the last few scenes. When Morell and Monsignor Carey talk to Terry in her own house, most of the shots feel the dominating force of a mirror. There is a two-shot with Terry in the background, Carey in the foreground surrounded by chairs and the mirror, which cuts to one with the mirror behind them and clocks in soft-focus. The mirror suggests not only false surface, but the distance from themselves, that the characters have travelled by this time. The perceptual state is one of relative chaos, with no real centre for the determination of visual form. Soft-focus objects, scattered around the room.

Similarly, in the scene in which Carey comes to the seminary for the disposition after the rector's death, the characters are arrayed amidst

pictures, lamps, a desk, and a window. The cutting between them very definitely points to their being the reflections of each other, particularly with the insertion of an out-of-balance portrait of Lincoln added to the basic pattern quickly becoming an integral part of it. The frame itself takes on the aspect of a mirror, giving it a surface away from itself.

The final and climactic scene begins in the yard outside the seminary chapel. Arnoux is walking along the outside stairs when he comes upon Terry framed amidst a mass of flowers. For her to be surrounded by the falseness of the creations of nature at a time when she is taking steps toward what she thinks will be a new life fastens a façade to her enterprise. She tries to look up, heeding the theme for the whole scene, and Sirk cuts away to Morell and Arnoux looking at her from a ledge. This downward shot is of intricate construction: its plane is clearly tilted inward but changed by its three-level makeup. The two men are in the foreground, separated from Terry below by a rail. Once again, attention is drawn to the background, which initiates the process of bringing the frame toward the surface. A constant blend of tonalities throughout completes this accomplishment. As Sirk holds the shot, they look away and Terry enters the chapel, her disappearance from the former image creating a new tension in the image. Inside, the first shot is almost a point-of-view of seminary musicians. Perceptual disorder is introduced with a cut to an overhead shot of Terry in front of the altar, with columns in the foreground. There is yet no centre, and the power of the altar is not restored. But then begins the most remarkable sequence of all. He cuts to Terry looking intently at the altar; she is flattened in the frame, unable to reach out. The altar, filling the frame, appears briefly; the object of her prayer, of her being, takes on a frighteningly dominant position. Sirk intercuts Terry's gaze and the two men watching her from the back of the chapel, all absolutely powerless to break out of the surface to the slightest degree, much less make any overt movement. Suddenly Terry, still imprisoned in the frame, struggles to her feet and begins to walk. Then Sirk inserts the ultimate image — the altar again — but now in soft-focus. What follows briefly is a long shot downward of Terry falling toward the altar; a medium shot of Morell and Arnoux coming up to her, with the soft altar in the background; a montage sequence of close-ups of the three characters; a slightly less close shot of Morell rising in front of the altar; another close-up of Arnoux.

At best, it is impossible to describe the 'meaning' of such an ending, yet certain things can be said.⁶ The theme of object-domination is brought to the frontiers of its possibilities; the two shots of the altar, now sharp, now soft-focused, are the embodiment of the most complete control. That power is demonstrated by the achievement of the second 'miracle', Terry's first steps forward. But what is the nature of the

power? Is it a result of Terry's prayer and therefore largely attributable to her? I would say no, since never is Terry herself released from the iron grip of the frame-surface. Only the soft altar shot begins to approach such a breakthrough, and even then, only for an instant. Thus, while the 'miracle' is physically just that (there seems no argument here), on another level it is the most advanced manifestation of the progression of object-control we have seen all through the film. In this sense it was almost inevitable, being the only logical conclusion to the whole pattern of development. To jump to such a statement, however, would be far too hasty. Certainly the ending was not entirely predetermined, and herein lies some of its mystery. It is necessary to take a middle ground between the extreme positions of total necessity and total contingency in order to move in the right direction.

The two altar shots comprise the climax to Sirk's vital perceptual theme. The most convenient reference is to the scene in which Terry sees a cross in the distance. In thematic terms, Terry's basic goal is to see, to be able to organise her visual experience in a coherent, self-contained manner. The soft focus shot shatters in the most startling way any illusion that this might be possible. It is arguable that by this point in the film, no such illusion in the mind of the viewer exists, too many times has the spectre been raised, and too many times has it been shattered. But the actual development of the final scene shows that this argument can be discarded. Terry's intentions, the graceful but sharply defined cutting between long and close shots, along with the mysterious reactions of the others seem not only to resurrect the possibility, but to bring it to its greatest height. Thus, we should assess the effects of the scene from this standpoint. Up to the ending, all attempts to see clearly were frustrated. In fact, only Terry among the characters had not yet been completely defeated in this endeavour. Her motivation, inspired by 'faith', was the strongest, and she alone was able to continue. The prayer at the altar represents the most all-out effort possible along these lines. And no defeat could have been more decisively administered. First she is given a foretaste of clear vision, the sharply focused altar shot. Then, at her moment of triumph, at a time when she had successfully cleansed her mind of any other thought, at her maximum depth of concentration, her vision is the most incoherent. It was precisely as a result of these preconditions of her mental state that the visual chaos appeared when it did. To abolish her contextual world from her consciousness meant to eliminate the possibility of organised present perception. This is the film's, and Sirk's, most pessimistic conclusion. It is in such an aura of ambiguity that the greatness of *The First Legion* lies.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No 189 (April 1967), 'Entretien avec Douglas Sirk', p 70.
2. *ibid*, p 70.
3. *ibid*, p 23.
4. *ibid*, p 70.
5. *The First Legion* was filmed as an independent production mainly on location at the Mission Inn, Riverside in May-June 1950, although it was not released until May 1951. It was therefore Sirk's first film on his return to America, made before *Mystery Submarine*, and the 1951 dating given in most filmographies is incorrect. (Jon Halliday)
6. '... The main bit of irony (in *The First Legion*) is when the Jesuits are second miracle is a real bit of irony. This would have been a good picture if I hadn't had those goddam Jesuits on the set. And there's another thing I'd like to mention here, about *The First Legion*. I told you it was shot entirely on location — not a single studio shot. Where and how you shoot a film is integral to its whole conception. It is a technical theme, but also something wider. The two films I shot on location were *The First Legion* and *Captain Lightfoot*: there is not a single studio shot in either, and it gives a certain character to both pictures.' (Douglas Sirk talking to John Halliday in *Sirk on Sirk* to be published in the *Cinema One* series later this year.)

CREDITS

Director :	Douglas Sirk
Producer :	Douglas Sirk, Rudolph Joseph
Distributor :	United Artists
Script :	Francis D. Lyon, from the play by Emmett Lavery (adapter)
Photography :	Robert de Grasse
Music :	Hans Sommer
Technical Consultant :	Father Thomas J. Sullivan of the University of St Ignatius Loyola

Charles Boyer (*Father Marc Arnoux*), William Demarest (*Monsignor Michael Carey*), Lyle Bettger (*Dr Peter Morell*), Barbara Rush (*Terry Gilmartin*), Leo G. Carroll (*Father Paul Duquesne*), Walter Hampden (*Father Edward Quatermain*), Wesley Addy (*Father John Fulton*), Taylor Holmes (*Father Keene*), H. B. Warner (*Father José Sierra*), George Zucco (*Father Robert Stuart*), John McGuire (*Father Tom Rawleigh*), Clifford Brooke (*lay brother*), Dorothy Adams (*Mrs Dunn*), Queenie Smith (*Henrietta*), Jacqueline de Witt (*nurse*), Bill Edwards (*Joe*).

86 minutes

Filmography

I German Period

- 1935 *April, April*
- 1935 *Das Mädchen vom Moorhof (The Girl from The Marshcroft)*
- 1935 *Stützen der Gesellschaft (Pillars of Society)*
- 1936 *Schlussakkord (Final Accord/Ninth Symphony)*
- 1936 *Das Hofkonzert (The Court Concert)*
- 1936 *La Chanson du Souvenir (Song of Remembrance)*
- 1937 *Zu Neuen Ufern (Life begins Anew/To New Shores)*
- 1937 *La Habanera*

II American Period

- 1942 *Hitler's Madman*
- 1944 *Summer Storm*
- 1945 *A Scandal in Paris*
- 1947 *Lured/Personal Column*
- 1947 *Sleep, My Love*
- 1948 *Siren of Atlantis (with Gregg G. Tallas, Arthur Ripley and John Brahm)*
- 1948 *Shockproof*
- 1948 *Slightly French*
- 1950 *The First Legion*
- 1950 *Mystery Submarine*
- 1951 *Thunder on the Hill*
- 1951 *The Lady Pays Off*
- 1951 *Weekend with Father*
- 1951 *Has Anybody Seen my Gal?*
- 1952 *No Room for the Groom*
- 1952 *Meet me at the Fair*
- 1952 *Take me to Town*
- 1953 *All I Desire*
- 1953 *Taza, Son of Cochise*
- 1953 *Magnificent Obsession*
- 1954 *Sign of the Pagan*
- 1955 *Captain Lightfoot*
- 1955 *All That Heaven Allows*
- 1955 *There's Always Tomorrow*
- 1956 *Written on the Wind*
- 1957 *Battle Hymn*
- 1957 *Interlude*
- 1957 *The Tarnished Angels*
- 1958 *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*
- 1958 *Imitation of Life*

SEFT PUBLICATIONS

readers who wish to take advantage of the limited stocks of back numbers still available should fill in the coupon below.

screen education yearbook

1960/61	37½p (7s 6d)
1964	37½p (7s 6d)
1967, 1968	62½p (12s 6d) ea.
1969	75p (15s)

screen

vol 10, nos 2 & 3	30p (6s) ea.
no 4/5	50p (10s)
no 6	30p (6s)
vol 11, nos 1, 2 & 3	40p (8s)
no 4/5	60p (12s)
no 6	40p (8s)

screen education

nos 20, 23-31 (incl.)	10p (2s)
32, 33, 35, 37-41 (incl.)	12½p (2s 6d)
44-46 (incl.)	15p (3s)

a film society handbook, ed. r. c. vannoey (practical information on the organization and operation of school, college and youth club film societies). 12½p (2s 6d)

young film makers (a primer on the organization of film making by young people in school, college and youth clubs). 10p (2s)

100 films for juniors, compiled by s. g. p. alexander (notes on forty feature films and sixty supporting shorts suitable for primary schools). 10p (2s)

Please send me

.....

.....

I enclose my cheque/Postal Order for

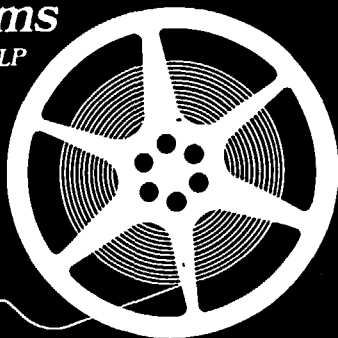
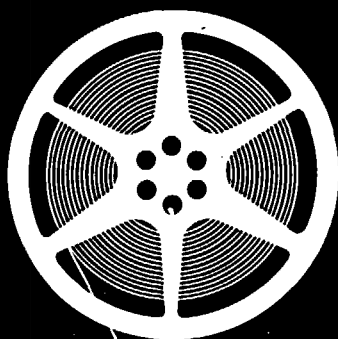
NAME

ADDRESS

Return to : SEFT, 81 Dean Street, London W1V 6AA

British Transport Films

Melbury House · Melbury Terrace · London NW1 6LP
Telephone 01-262 3232



fully illustrated · price 25p
1971 catalogue available now

S C R E E N

Autumn 1971

walter benjamin — photography and art
stanley mitchell — marinetti and mayakovsky
christopher williams — politics and the image
fred camper — films of john ford
ed buscombe — john ford and 19c painting
documents from *new lef* and *lef*: vertov, brik, tynyanov

winter 1971

special issue — film education
the economics of audio-visual aids
film and the humanities curriculum project
arnheim and visual perception
film and the black papers on education
in addition: translations from the french *avant-garde*

I wish to subscribe to Screen for one year. I enclose a cheque/
Postal Order for

To: SEFT Name

81 Dean Street Address

London W1V 6AA

Subscription rates: UK and Australia £1.80; USA and Canada \$6.50

Translations: Film and Ideology

Screen Spring 1971 published the first part of a debate between Cahiers du Cinéma and Cinéthiques on the relations of film, film criticism and ideology.

Screen in this issue continues these translations with an editorial and article from Cinéthique and the detailed reply to these in Cahiers du Cinéma.

Direction

'Ask yourselves whether a WORKING MAN or a PEASANT with a serious interest in the cinema could understand everything you write' (extract from a reader's letter). As it is the aim of our enterprise to combat the obscurantism and dogmatism rife in contemporary cinema criticism, we have to nip a reputation for being esoteric in the bud. It is easy to see where the accusation that we are writing for an elite comes from: our critics have refused to confront the question inherent in the reader's letter: what kind of cinema can, in the society where we are writing and filming, best serve the interests of the Revolution, and, in the first instance, those of the working class? And inherent in this question is another (which bourgeois criticism leans over backwards to ignore): *what form does capitalist exploitation take in the cinema?*

Putting the question that way obliges one to recognise that a film is a product of work. People are generally ready to admit that work is an appropriate word to describe the activities of the technicians (which does not prevent the specialist press from keeping quiet about their economic exploitation) but to describe the film itself as a product of it provokes active resistance. In the first place, people say, a film isn't a product; it is the 'creation' of an 'author' who 'expresses' his 'world-

sets up in place of Bazin's is still an idealist one.

2. This is a generic term, including, of course, film-directors, except where they belong to a trade union (or a society like the SFR) which sets them apart from the technicians.
3. Hanoun's *Octobre à Madrid* is an exception here, however, and Lajournade's *Joueur de quilles* which deals metaphorically with money.
4. Any film can, of course, be used for directly political ends if it has a political commentary added to it. But problems of information and propaganda should not be allowed to hide the problems of the cinema in a capitalist society. We must not mix our historical situations. Contemporary France is nothing like contemporary China. We must not confuse the illustration of 'Capital' with the application one can make of it to the means of ideological production (cinematography, literature, etc) according to the specific nature of each. We shall return in more length to these points in our next article.

Parenthesis or Indirect Route

an attempt at theoretical definition of the relationship between cinema and politics

When bourgeois idealists baldly assert that the cinema has 'nothing to do with' politics, we immediately feel tempted to assert the exact opposite: that the cinema is always political, because in the class struggle nothing is irrelevant, nothing can be put in PARENTHESES. With this head-on clash of views, one being the exact *reverse* of the other, a theoretically ill-defined subject, the cinema, enters a theoretically well-defined practice, politics. Such a *situation* cannot be anything but ideological. The bald statement from which it proceeds cannot be integrated into a theory of the cinema until we recognise that it carries any number of imprecisions which have to be clarified, and that it implies an unsolved problem, which has to be correctly formulated before it can be answered. This problem is: there is a RELATION between politics and the cinema, but what is it? Put another way: does the cinema belong to

the political sphere of influence, or some other? If the former, what is its particular function? If the latter: what are, and what could be, its links with the political sphere of influence?

We must make clear from the very beginning, what our ultimate aim is in doing this work. We want to establish a few of the theoretical elements necessary for a cinema practice that will effectively serve the proletarian cause. We are attempting to discover in what areas (instances) and along what lines the cinema can be integrated into revolutionary practice. Our project is not empty speculation; it is directly linked to a precise political project. It is absolutely necessary, because 'there is no revolutionary practice without revolutionary theory.'

At every step in the progress of our theoretical work we shall continuously be defining the ideology we reject. So, in working towards an answer to the questions we asked in the first paragraph, we shall first compare the ideological NOTION with the theoretical CONCEPT of the cinema, and then proceed to discuss their 'relations' in terms of the METAPHORS, parenthesis (standing for the idealist function), and indirect route (standing for the theoretical function).

correct use of the parenthesis

Let us look for a moment at a metaphor which accurately 'crystallises' one aspect of the problem: the parenthesis. A metaphor is always a symptom of a certain ideological system, and we have to find out which one 'parenthesis' is symptomatic of, even if only to appreciate fully its negative effects. For we are only introducing the *notion of parenthesis* here in order to negate it by a materialist discourse, and try to find out in the process, what are the idealist positions on art.

It is, in fact, to an idealist notion of the written sentence that the idea in question relates. The expression 'to put something in parentheses' indicates a hierarchic system of signs: those in parentheses being less important than the others, if not completely unimportant. But important in relation to what? In relation to the only thing that really counts in idealist rhetoric: the meaning. This is understood as having an existence prior to the sentence, which only renders it, expresses it, with a greater or lesser degree of exactness. It is understood that anything in parentheses renders the meaning inexactly, if at all. Such an idea is mystifying. It conceals the material nature of the written word, the fact that a sentence is a collection of signs which *produce* a meaning by being put in certain relationships to each other, and among which those in parentheses have a specific, non-hierarchic role to play. There is a materialist way of treating signs within a sentence which destroys the idealist notion of 'parenthesis'. (See the use which Philippe Sollers makes of it in *Nombres*.)

To introduce, metaphorically, the notion of parenthesis into the ideological discourse on the relationship between cinema and politics is an excellent way for us, from our materialist standpoint, to reveal the mystifications involved in such a discourse. It amalgamates two mistakes, a linguistic and a political one. It is a secret doorway into the enemy's wider ideological strategy: the way in which they set up the distinctions: non-signifying/signifying, secondary/principal, which are 'always resolved by the complete *neutralisation* of the first term, with the result that one element (the cinema, for example) on the pretext that it belongs in a certain sphere of influence (the arts admittedly the late-comer, but better late than never) is refused any role in another (politics of course). The manoeuvre is simple: all that has to be done is to reduce the field of politics to that of political 'life' (elections, governments) and that of the cinema to cinematographic *entertainment*. But if you introduce the concept of class struggle in place of the notion of 'politics' and the metaphorical 'parenthesis' in place of the empty 'nothing to do with' you have a Marxist reflex which explodes the bald statements of bourgeois idealism.

But if this metaphor is effective in showing up the twofold error of idealism, it is useless, even dangerous, to think that by simply negating, or rather, inverting it, you will get the correct materialist formulation of the relationship between cinema and politics. For by inverting the metaphor all you do is place the cinema unequivocally *inside* the political sphere of influence, just as the signs contained within parentheses are also contained within the sentence: signs, equal to all the other signs. Whichever way we turn we find ourselves very quickly in an idealist dead end, unless we are prepared to go into some detailed definitions of what constitutes politics and cinema. First, what does the word *cinema* correspond to?

the word, the mask: the cinema

The *word* cinema, as the ruling class insists it be used, relates to an abstraction. In the light of the preceding discussion its ideological content is easy to discern.

The cinema *in itself* does not exist. When we say 'cinema' we are almost certainly, *because of the pressures of the system*, thinking of the CINEMA AS ENTERTAINMENT. But entertainment films are by no means the sum total of cinema (though they are the most important category, and the most advanced technically). There are also scientific films (medical, ethnological, chemical, political), pornographic films (with their own clandestine 16 and 8 mm circuits), militant films (also clandestine, for Politics, like Sex, is one of the major outcasts of capitalist society), military films (*they* have society's official blessing — the

fourth festival of military films has just been held at Versailles), and finally, advertising films (a very prosperous category this, and expanding rapidly). So, there are many and varied branches of the cinema, but the dominant usage has granted one of them a partial monopoly of the name.

Entertainment value thus becomes the *general criterion* for judging all the other categories, and it is true that they invite this fate by imitating entertainment films, 'It's good (not good) cinema': that is how people judge, for example, a scientific film, meaning 'It is (is not) entertainment'. In this way the cinema as entertainment becomes a mask which hides any other cinematic practice, a way of rejecting anything other than itself, including the 'political' cinema, if such a thing exists. The first conclusions to be drawn from this is how important the cinema must be among the arsenal of means employed by the bourgeoisie to maintain its power and defend its interest, but also how forceful an effect any kind of cinema which rejected the entertainment criterion could have.

Our attempt at a theoretical definition of the cinema will be grounded in cutting ourselves free from the idealist conception outlined above. We shall not assess the cinema in terms of entertainment (or even, as some people have done, in terms of 'anti-entertainment', a simple inversion of this nature remains ideological), but in MATERIALIST terms: what it is PHYSICALLY, in audio-visual terms, as a collection of sounds and images projected on a screen; and what it does SOCIALLY: its function in this or that branch of *social practice*.

The word 'cinema' should never be written without additional qualification, indicating the particular practice in which it is integrated (bearing in mind that this may or may not also be 'praxis' — tending to revolutionary change). The problem which concerns us (theoretical definition of the relationship between cinema and politics) can be put this way: is it theoretically justifiable to talk about 'political cinema'?

NB: We are continuing to use the word 'cinema' without qualification here, not because we are not aware of its different sub-divisions, but because we are discussing its material, physical form (its 'nature') existing prior to the subdivisions conferred on it by social practice, if such a distinction can be made. We shall discuss what specific role the cinema acquires by virtue of its material form (the perspective code which it reproduces) later in our argument.

political practice and theory

'By *practice* we mean, in general, any process *transforming* a given raw material into a given *product*, the transformation being effected by a given expenditure of labour using given means (of production).'

'This general definition of practice includes within itself the possibility of particularity. There are different practices which are really distinct from each other, although belonging organically to the same complex whole.' (Louis Althusser: 'On Dialectical Materialism' in *For Marx*.)

This complex whole is social practice. It implies a structured totality comprising all the practices of a given society.

It can be divided into economic practice (which is the determining one in the last instance), political practice, ideological practice, and theoretical practice.

When we were listing, above, the various categories of cinema, we made no attempt to structure them. To proceed scientifically we have to do so. We must place the cinema SPECIFICALLY in one of the categories of social practice, and ascertain its link with the others.

Politics is a *practice* which transforms its raw material (given social relations) into a given product (new social relations) by the systematic use of given means of production (the *class* struggle). In the case of a Marxist party, this practice is based on a *theory*: 'it is not spontaneous but organised on the basis of the scientific theory of historical materialism.' (Althusser: *ibid.*)

We can now pose the question as follows: Has cinematographic practice a place in political practice? At no moment in political practice does it have a specific role to play, so we have to conclude that IT IS NOT SPECIFICALLY POLITICAL. (To put it another way, it is neither a means, nor a product, nor a raw material of political practice.) When someone does affirm, despite the evidence that the cinema belongs within the political sphere of influence, it means that he is either irresponsibly shutting his eyes to the specific nature of the class struggle, or deliberately trying to hold it back by putting it in the wrong context.

We can now see the beginnings of an answer to our problem emerging: the relation between cinema and politics is not that they are the same. The cinema is not *specifically* political. This does not mean that it and politics have no bearing on each other, or that there cannot be some political *films*. But then what is the relation, and what particular conditions qualify a film as political?

indirect influence: specificity

In *Cinématique* no 4 we studied the relation between *cinema and economy*. To recapitulate on our findings:

We set ourselves the question: *what* produces a film, and came to the conclusion that a film is the product of several determining factors, of which economics is an important one (here as everywhere) but not the most important, which was ideology.

We then attempted to discover what the film produces, and chiefly if it figures in the manufacture of economic products. We decided that it did, but in a special way. It does not take part in the process of transforming raw material into products in such a directly instrumental way as machinery or human labour, but it does contribute to the process by indirect influence: propagating obscurantist ideology which inculcates in the exploited workers the idea that their situation as alienated producers is normal and natural.

These conclusions establish the **RELATION BETWEEN CINEMA AND ECONOMY**: *they converge at the juncture of economy and ideology.*

If we study the function referred to as 'indirect influence' above, it will cast light on the relation between cinema and politics, because it too occurs at a point of juncture, this time where ideology converges with politics. If we bring this conclusion, and the conclusion of the last paragraph together, we discover the cinema's specific place: **WITHIN THE IDEOLOGICAL SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.**

We can now set down the conditions under which cinema and political practice converge. A film can, at a given historical moment, hold back, mask, or reactivate the class struggle, by modifying the subjective factor in the struggle, ie the class consciousness of the proletariat, which is at present the principal aspect of the principal contradiction (bourgeoisie/proletariat). This is its specific relationship to the class struggle: it has 'something to do with' the minds of those who practice it (or don't practice it). 'Something'. But what?

ideological function of the cinema

'An ideology is a system (possessing its own logic and rigour) of representation (images, myths, ideas or concepts, as the case may be) existing and having a historical role within a given society.' (Louis Althusser: 'Marxism and Humanism' in *For Marx*.)

The cinema's particular ideological function is integrated within this general definition.

Its 'nature' (its material form) confers a twofold ideological function on the cinema, which has been reinforced by its history:

(a) It **REPRODUCES**, it reflects existing ideologies. It is therefore used (consciously or unconsciously, it makes little difference) as a vector in the process of circulating ideologies.

(b) It **PRODUCES** its own ideology: **THE IMPRESSION OF REALITY.** There is nothing on the screen, only reflections and shadows, and yet the first idea that the audience gets is that reality is there, as it

really is. People used to say about statues and portraits, 'He looks as though he might open his mouth any minute and say something', or 'He looks as though he might burst into movement'. But the 'as though' gives the game away, despite the appearance, something was *lacking*, and everyone knew it. Whereas in the cinema, there is no 'as though'. People say 'The leaves are moving.' But there are no leaves. The first thing people do is deny the existence of the screen: it opens like a *window*, it 'is' *transparent*. This illusion is the very substance of the specific ideology secreted by the cinema.

If one understands that ideology always presents itself in the form of a body of ideas and pictures of reality which people spontaneously accept as true, as *realistic*, it is easy to see why the cinema, by its specific nature, plays such a privileged role in the general ideological process. It REINFORCES the impression that what looks realistic must be real, and thus reinforces the ideology it reflects. It presents it as true, by virtue of its self-evident existence on the screen.

For this reason FUNCTION B IS INDISPENSABLE, in the cinema, to the exercise of function A. If the impression of reality ceases the ideologies reflected in it collapse, deprived of their support (only in the cinema of course, they continue to flourish in their native soil: society). When the mirror ceases to reflect, it is no longer a mirror. (But then, if the cinema loses its ideological existence, what kind of existence will it have to pass on to, in order to carry on functioning?)

TWO PRECISE PHENOMENA throw light on the relationship cinema/politics at the juncture ideology/politics.

The first is that of RECOGNITION. The audience recognise themselves in the representations on the screen: characters, ideas, myths, stories, structures, way of life. Here, much more than the concept of *identification* (which is too psychological) it is the concept of recognition which is at work. But because the dominant ideology in the cinema is that of the ruling class (as it is in the other media) it follows that most of the audience (which is known to be chiefly bourgeois and petit bourgeois) identify with and recognise themselves in what they see on the screen in one and the same function. It is indeed *their* world which *comes alive* in the darkened room. The reflection in the mirror is a 'faithful' one.

But to another section of the public, the mirror 'tells lies'. We have a class society dominated by the bourgeoisie, in which the cinema claims to be the same for everybody. However, a section of the cinema-going public consists of exploited workers, and in their case a second (but concomitant) ideological phenomenon occurs: MYSTIFICATION. They identify with what happens on the screen (mechanically) but they *cannot*, or ought not to be able to recognise themselves in it. Working class

people show they are aware of this when they describe anything ostentatiously phoney as '*du cinema*'. Unconsciously, the exploited react against an entertainment based on an ideology which justifies the theft of their surplus value, and which presents the existing abnormal relations of production as natural and right.

We asked: how can the cinema serve the revolution? We should now re-formulate it thus: how can we destroy this mystification? how can we displace the mechanism of recognition?

the impossible reversal

Destroy, subvert, transgress. But, and this is an important point, we are not saying that all ideology ought to be abolished, or that all ideology is necessarily 'bad'. ('It presupposes an ideological viewpoint to conceive of societies existing without any ideology, and it is completely Utopian to think that ideology as a whole, and not just one or other of its forms, will ever completely disappear from the world, and be replaced by science.' — Althusser: *For Marx*.) What we want to do is to establish the conditions in which the cinema can serve the proletarian cause. In other words, what it is decisive to know is: can the film transmit a proletarian ideology? And can the cinema have any other than an ideological function: a theoretical one for example?

Before we attempt to formulate a theory, we must examine the concrete experience constituted by those films which do attempt to serve the proletarian cause. These are the *socialist films* of the people's democracies, the '*social*' films of the bourgeois democracies, and the *militant films* of both. Their historical functions are different: one section aim at destroying the bourgeoisie, the other at advancing the dictatorship of the proletariat. But all have the same leading idea, to REVERSE the existing situation.

In *The German Ideology* Marx at one stage compared the action of the ideology to the action of the camera. He said that ideology showed us men and their relations upside down, 'as in a *camera obscura*', and it seems as though makers of socialist, social and militant films have adopted this as an all-purpose rule of thumb for making subversive pictures. 'The bourgeois cinema shows the bourgeois and their world view. All right then, we'll show workers and their world view' is what they seem to be saying. In other words, they are demanding a reversal of the situation, so that what was previously upside-down should now be right-way-up. But *what* are they actually proposing to reverse? We have to answer that question, or otherwise we shall be in a dead-end again. For if the cinema produces an indestructible illusion (idealist ideology) it is useless trying to reverse it. You cannot reverse an illusion, you can only destroy it.

Because their makers have never tackled the problem of the specific nature of the cinema all of these films, with a few exceptions (which we shall look at in detail) fall into the trap of *cinematic idealism*. How serious the results of this failure are depends on the historical situation: they are less grave in the socialist countries than they are under capitalism.

SOCIALIST FILMS

In a country where the proletariat is the ruling class, because it has taken possession of the means of production, ideological and economic, the specific ideological effect of the cinema (the impression of reality) works in its favour. It reinforces the credibility of representations of working class nobility, strength, and victory. These words sum up the *humanist* element of socialist realism. As 'the most important of all the arts' (Lenin) the cinema in a socialist society assumes first and foremost a *humanist* role: '... the avant-garde art *par excellence*, the art which is of a stature to translate the era of the victorious socialist revolution, the art which can most perfectly materialise the features of the new man of our times.' (EISENSTEIN: *Notes of a Film Director*.)

Far be it from us to deny the tactical importance of an idealist use of the cinema. Genuine humanism is an ideological necessity in a socialist society, and we shall attempt in a future issue of *Cinéthique* to study Socialist Realism from the point of view of its historical necessity, and not, as has been exclusively the case till now, from the point of view of its academic transgression of (bourgeois) aesthetics. But it is reasonable to ask whether the proletariat, at an advanced stage in its dictatorship, has much to gain from the image of itself reflected in such a fundamentally idealist method. Its assurance of its own victory, its strength, and its 'existence' might be better consolidated by liberating and developing the materialist truths of the cinema, which the bourgeoisie have of course never developed.

SOCIAL FILMS

Social films call for a much more severe treatment because they are produced in a historical context in which the proletariat is the exploited class. In other words, the impression of reality does not work in favour of its ideology. Someone who spends his whole career making films promoting the reverse of the ideology, may (with all the goodwill in the world) turn out in the end to have been an unconscious accomplice of the dominant ideology. The reason is that in a capitalist society, where the cinema is automatically aimed at the entire public, without distinction of class, these films can only reproduce (and so are produced by) the image of 'real life' acceptable to that section of bourgeois ideology

known as 'the guilty conscience'. Any other image is not acceptable because the 'audience who count' (and obviously they count in other places as well as the cinema) would not recognise themselves in it. So the very thing these films cannot do is exactly the thing they ought to do in order to serve the proletarian cause — be *class* films. Film-makers cannot achieve the objective they set out to achieve, provoke recognition, stir up consciousness, because they have never considered the real economic and political context and its precise implications in the production and distribution of the object that is a film, and they have never thought about the specific ideological effects of the film camera.

MILITANT FILMS

Militant film-making is practised clandestinely and the products distributed selectively, which shows that it is conceived as an arm in the class struggle. In this it has a real advantage over social films. But the revolutionary zeal of those involved in it (to the point where zeal sometimes dissolves into wishful thinking) is hindered in achieving anything of importance by neglect of the specific ideological effect. Militant film-makers believe they are contributing to revolutionary action by reproducing it on the screen, but they forget that revolution can only be represented in the cinema as an *absence* and that all depictions of it do not compensate for the fact that it has not yet been achieved, even if the final effect of these films is to provoke a desire, to compensate, to take revenge.

the theoretical issue

All these attempts ultimately come up against a blank wall, some sooner than others, and we are forced to the conclusion that the 'nature' of the cinema and its history have integrated it into idealist ideology. The only way which can transgress and break out is via theoretical practice.

If the cinema is integrated into theoretical practice it can go beyond its idealist, ideological role. The break which exists in general between a theory and the ideology which preceded it is represented in the cinema by the break existing between the function of knowledge, and the function of recognition.

There are two roles which the cinema could play in the theoretical process. We shall detail later those few, exceptional films which have already assumed them, with varying degrees of success:

- (a) It can REPRODUCE KNOWLEDGE produced by one or other of the sciences (historical materialism, medicine, physics, geography, etc). It acts as a vector in the process of communicating knowledge.
- (b) It PRODUCES SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE about itself. It can show the material facts of its physical and social existence. It can draw

away the veil which normally covers a film's ideological, political and economic function, and by doing so denounce the ideology inherent in the cinema's 'impression of reality'. Through this action, it becomes theoretical.

From the foregoing it should be clear that function (b) is of prime importance. It conditions the exercise of function (a). A film has to work on the theoretical level before it can communicate knowledge.

We can therefore formulate the following decisive rule: IN THE CINEMA THE COMMUNICATION OF KNOWLEDGE IS ATTENDANT UPON THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CINEMA. If the two functions do not coincide the film relapses into ideology. Truths presented in it convince not because they are known theoretically, but because they are made credible by the film.

Of course there is not an equal quantity of both functions in every theoretical film (there is generally more communication of knowledge than there is production of specific knowledge about the cinema) but there is always a trace of specific knowledge.

As we said before, the films which work on a theoretical level are few and far between. The only socialist films among them are the works of Eisenstein and Vertov, and they could be said to be theoretical in part only, for in their case the theoretical break often takes place within the film. There are no social films which work on a theoretical level: all are idealist; certain militant films do effect the break, with varying degrees of decisiveness: *Un Film comme les autres*, *Flins*, *L'Heure des brasiers*. Some films will not go into either the socialist or the militant category, but still belong within the general description which we would apply to all the films we have mentioned: *materialist cinema*. *Octobre à Madrid*, *Méditerranée*, *le Joueur de quilles*. All these are films which we ought to study and keep on studying if we want to see the way ahead into a cinema which will really be of use to the proletariat in its struggle for power.

the indirect route, the different struggle

The cinema is not outside the class struggle, but it does not participate in it directly, in that it is not a specific means of political practice. However, it does have an influence on it, via the INDIRECT ROUTE of its particular field of operations: *the mortal struggle between materialism and idealism* which is directly linked to the class struggle. The struggle for the cinema is always different in kind; it is a *struggle at one remove*. A strike, for example, is a political weapon of the proletariat; a film about a strike is not (even if it is Eisenstein's). A film is only a weapon

in its own area, which is not politics but the particular indirect route (ideology) *connecting* it to politics.

Further: a film about politics is more closely related to political practice than a film about love, but it still has to take that famous indirect route. It may be depicting political events (ideological function: communication of ideologies) or it may be the vehicle for a concrete analysis of a concrete situation (theoretical function: communication of knowledge) it always does it outside the field of political practice (the class struggle), in the field of ideological practice (the struggle between materialism and idealism) — at the cinema. This discussion only refers to cinema films not to television and video-tape. The instantaneous image produced by the mobile television camera does enter directly into political practice (this is particularly evident at election-time). It has a similar effect to a tract or a speech. This poses some problems of definition.*

We must stress yet again that the cinema cannot and does not influence the balance of forces in the political sphere (ie between bourgeoisie and proletariat) but in the ideological sphere (between idealism and materialism). And even here the changes it can effect are dependent on the social and economic climate. But not entirely so — this is why effective action is possible in this field without a change in the balance of political power. So the cinema is *relatively* autonomous and *relatively* determining, and we should work in the knowledge that a change in political relationships will affect our work, and that the progress towards the seizure of power by the proletariat will be extended to what we do.

We know that all the different areas of influence in a given society are linked to each other, in their process of transformation, according to systematic rules of determination and superdetermination. From this we can proceed with every confidence to say that the cinema is *not* irrelevant to the social whole. The route which links it with the whole is an indirect one, but on its own ground, it is decisive. For the proletariat must appropriate the means of production in the cinema. It will not be able to appropriate them completely unless it has first taken over the means of economic production and the state machine, but after that the takeover must be complete. It never has been, so far.

When we referred metaphorically to the cinema's 'indirect route' to political action, we felt the metaphor took account of its complex network of relationships, and implied both moments of juncture and

* It would be interesting to analyse the way candidates for the French presidency used the medium during their electoral campaigns. The ones who claimed to represent historical/dialectical materialism (Duclos, Krifine, Rocard) used it in just the same way as the bourgeois idealists, without having thought about, or taken any measures appropriate to the problem of its specific nature. Was it really of so little relevance?

moments of divergence. By analogy, one might say that the opposite and mistaken proceeding is to take a 'short cut' by placing the cinema right *inside* politics, even while flying in the face of their different specific natures. Our metaphor underlines the complete impossibility of confining the cinema's activity to the short straight road of reproducing political 'spectacles' or transmitting political analyses. It points out that the cinema can proceed along the new route of theoretical practice. (We shall have to define and try out the practicabilities of this new route, paying special attention to the problem of fiction.) The 'indirect route' also includes a place for historically superseded ideologies, which can form a *reservoir* of influence in the cinema (if they remain alive), or take the form of stocks of historically determined products which can nonetheless link with other situations, whether of the same historical moment or another (the 'timelessness' and 'universality' of art). Finally the metaphor of the indirect route, and the concept of the cinema's difference from politics have themselves originated from theoretical work (by Jacques Derrida). Anyone practising materialist research into the cinema would profit from taking cognizance of this work at one stage or another.

definitions, openings

It is now possible to define the kind of film which is 'useful to the proletariat': a materialist film, a dialectical film, a film which is integrated into the history of the proletariat.

A MATERIALIST FILM is one which does not give illusory reflections of reality. In fact it 'reflects' nothing. It starts from its own material nature (flat screen, natural ideological bias, audience) and that of the world, and shows them both, all in one movement. This movement is the theoretical one. It provides scientific knowledge of the world and the cinema, and is the means whereby the cinema fights its part of the battle against idealism. But in order to win it has to be dialectical as well, otherwise it is only a beautiful but useless piece of machinery, which carries on functioning in a void without ever having been harnessed for the transformation of reality. A DIALECTICAL FILM is one made in the consciousness, which it is able to transmit to the audience, of the exact process whereby an item of knowledge or a depiction of reality is transformed by degrees into *screen material* to be then re-converted into knowledge and a view of reality in the audience's mind.

But, given that we accept that the film is not a magic object, functioning either by occult influence, divine grace, or talismanic virtue, we have to accept that the dialectical process must be backed up by work on the part of the audience, they must decipher the film, read the signs produced by its inner working.

It is only in this category (dialectical materialist cinema) that we can find any films at all which, *theoretically* speaking, could be qualified as political, with all the reservations that we indicated. These are the films which transmit knowledge produced by historical materialism, the theory which informs the political practice of Marxist parties. Theoretically speaking one cannot describe an idealist film about politics as political, because it moves entirely in the ideological sphere, politically and cinematically (turning everything into a spectacle). It is necessary to keep insisting on this point, because the INFLATION OF THE WORD POLITICAL is an ideological by-product which blurs the area of confrontation, which is always to the benefit of the ruling class, who do not need theoretical clarity to impose their ideas.

Finally, is it necessary to point out that a film which will be of use to the proletarian cause has to be produced in organic relationship with working class organisations, and that its date in the struggle ought to be *written* on it?

Jean-Paul Fargier

These two articles appeared in Cinéthique No 5, September/October 1969, and are reprinted here with the permission of the Editors.

Cinema/Ideology/Criticism (2)

Examining a critique at its critical point

This article is chiefly a refutation of others which have appeared elsewhere, and might therefore appear to be only of transitory polemical interest. We leave it to the reader to decide whether it belongs in the same position as its predecessor, or whether it ought really to have gone in the reviews section. We think that its insistently negative approach may provide a basis for later articles in *Cahiers*.

The problem of what film criticism is, and what it ought to be, is central to all our discussions. The first step in tackling it must be, as it was with films, to analyse the present situation.

In section III of our preceding article we made the following comment about the criticism that appears in film magazines (we were referring to French magazines, but in fact the situation is general):

The tradition of frivolous and evanescent writing on the cinema is as tenacious as it is prolific, and film analysis today is still massively determined by idealistic presuppositions. It wanders farther abroad today but its method is still basically empirical.

This comment requires further elaboration, and we shall come back to it at a later date. First priority we feel, however, should go to a new development: a magazine, *Cinéthique* (five issues published so far) which aims explicitly at breaking away from the empirical method and formulating a genuine theory of the cinema. Militantly Marxist, vociferously revolutionary and committed to the proletarian cause, the magazine aims at prompting materialism and combating the idealism which cinema critics cling to with such tenacity.

It must be evident to anyone who read our last article that such a programme is going to meet with our approval — many of our points are the same. But however excellent principles may be, we do not believe in

leaving them at the programme stage. Good intentions have to be carried out. And as *Cinéthique* has freely criticised *Cahiers* it seems reasonable for us, in our turn, to take a look at the contents of *Cinéthique*, and find out whether it is more than a programme and a parade of principles. We shall ask whether what we read in the magazine is really an example of practice informed by principle, or a series of affirmations designed to compensate for its absence.

We think it is important to do this analysis at once, because *Cinéthique* claims to be offering a model for militant criticism, *based directly on dialectical materialism* (which is something we called for in our last article) while giving lessons in Marxism to film makers at the same time. All of this interests us greatly, and is potentially relevant to all serious reflection today on the cinema and criticism.

I

The sample issue we chose was the most recent (No 5). Out of it we selected the articles by its four regular authors, as being most indicative of the magazine's 'line': Gérard Leblanc ('Direction'; 'Godard Use Value or Exchange Value'; 'L'Été'), Jean-Paul Fargier ('The Parenthesis and the Indirect Route: an attempt at theoretical definition of the relationship between cinema and politics'; 'Discourse — Film (Revolution)-Mutism: Lajournade's *le Joueur de quilles*') and Eliane le Grivès-Simon Luciani ('Birth of a Theory').

As they form the editorial board of the magazine, we are not doing any of them an injustice if we take their various contributions as a single text epitomising the magazine. In any case *Cinéthique* frequently defines itself as a unified body of work, rather than a collection of separate articles: 'our work stands at the break . . .', '*Cinéthique*: a body of writing . . .'. 'Our work, as embodied in the magazine, is in the process of evolution (historical development). It could be described as an attempt at theorisation which aims to subvert the idealist discourse on the cinema which is in force at the present time, by systematically breaking down its methods of alienation and justification', etc. And it really is all the same text, continuing from article to article to state the same position, using the same examples, formulating exactly the same theoretical principles, demanding to be read as a single body of work. We have to study how far its authors have managed to effect the separation they claim to have effected between their own work and the ideology of capitalism 'in force at the present time' and its idealist discourse. Through this we hope to discover whether, as we suspect, the *break* of which they claim *Cinéthique* to be the radical result is, in fact, simply an *apparent break*, just another ideological statement within the general ideological discourse. *Cinéthique* is militant, but is it also *revolutionary*?

It might seem revolutionary to use Marxism to evolve a theory of cinema and cinema criticism. On the other hand, it might be just another manifestation of self-deluding militant zeal.

A first and highly symptomatic difficulty about the text is that the authors have recourse to a number of notions which are never formulated theoretically, but *simply stated*, as though that were enough to make the reader understand them: (for example: break, integrated, trace, work, representation, production, breaking-down, exclusion, mutism, theory, body, fiction, false image, reflection, etc). All these expressions are used in a manipulative and inadequately reasoned manner.¹ And when an attempt is made to formulate a notion theoretically (as for instance *parenthesis* or *political*) it is done in a curious and revealing way. The author (or authors) begins by suggesting that there is a problem surrounding the notion, which has either not been thought about, or thought about in the wrong way (for ideological or other reasons), making it look as though the *Cinématique* group had discovered the problem, which he goes into in great detail. When he has thus exhausted the problem, he falls back on the notion itself (which has been left untouched by the preceding excursion into theory, and has therefore neither gained or lost any theoretical weight). In fact the entire discussion has centred around what was precisely a side-issue: some element which rendered discussion of the basic issue difficult, but which was in itself comparatively easy to solve, and was one suspects, set up for precisely that reason. The argument goes in a circle round the basic issue of formulating the notion theoretically, without ever tackling it. After this ritual the author casually picks up the notion and proceeds to use it as though everything that was needful had been done. This is the fate of the notion of *parenthesis*. We are told why the notion has been 'in parenthesis' for so long, we are told that the raising of this ban and the possibility of using the notion again are of the first importance for the comprehension of the relation between cinema and politics, but we are not told what this notion of 'parenthesis' means, or the various issues that are left in parenthesis by the way it is used. . . .²

So, there are two obstacles in the way of anyone trying to read the text constructively. It purports to analyse the relation between cinema and ideology, and the relation between cinema and politics. But concepts are handled in an imprecise and manipulative way, and radical terminology is thrown in with such abandon that one finally has the impression it is simply being used to mystify. Pseudo-scientific rigour quickly takes the place (and masks the absence) of genuine theoretical rigour (the word *theory* itself has a high frequency ratio in the text but is still never formulated theoretically). The text is marked by a laziness and imprecision in theorising which aligns it on the side of the dominant ideol-

logical discourse, whatever its authors, with their talk of 'breaks' may have thought. The second problem is that when the authors try and work out the theory of their own notions, they substitute exposition of the ideological adjuncts of those notions for a scientific definition of the notions themselves, and the text becomes so muddled theoretically that it is swallowed up in the confusion of the dominant ideology. The authors are drawing the wool over their own eyes. Let us look at a few examples.

(a) The 'break'. *Cinématique* make extensive use of this term to mark the point of departure between alienated products of bourgeois ideology (films, magazines) and revolutionary ideological products (films, magazines). Three quotations:

1. The break: however, some written work and some films are irreducible to (bourgeois) ideology: *Octobre à Madrid (Cinématique)*.
2. Our work (*Cinématique* again) then, establishes what could be called a 'break', that is to say the transformation of a neurotic ideological discourse into a scientific revolutionary discourse.
3. . . . the 'nature' of the cinema and its history have integrated it into idealist ideology. The only way in which it can transgress and break out is via *theoretical practice*. If the cinema is integrated into theoretical practice it can go beyond its idealist, ideological role. The break which exists in general between a theory and the ideology which preceded it is represented in the cinema by the break existing between the function of knowledge and the function of recognition.

All this is hopelessly confused. When Althusser talks about a 'break' he is adopting the concept of the 'epistemological break' defined by Bachelard (the transition from ideology to science) and he uses the term to describe the difference between the writings of the young Marx and Marxism proper, as defined later by Marx himself — between writing that belonged in the field of philosophy (*Essays on Feuerbach*) and writing which became science (*Capital*). The *Cinématique* team may have read their Althusser, but they have not digested him, and their use of his terminology is sometimes unscientific to the point of fantasy. Without redefining it in their own way, they use the idea of the 'break' in a context from which it is automatically excluded in Althusser's definition: *the cinema is an ideological product*; its field of definition and exercise is ideology and not science. The basic problem is very simple; the cinema today is the instrument of the dominant ideology (bourgeois, capitalist); tomorrow we hope it will be the instrument of another kind of dominant ideology (socialist). But in between these two states of affairs, the nature of the cinema will not be transformed; it can never become a science, all that will be changed is the way it is used, and the purpose it is intended to serve. So to talk about a 'break' in reference to the cinema is only possible poetically, metaphorically, not scientifically

or theoretically. It might be that *Cinéthique* is using the term metaphorically, but then the magazine cannot claim to have 'established . . . a "break", that is to say the transformation of a neurotic ideological discourse into a scientific revolutionary discourse'. *Cinéthique* is nothing but ideology wrapped up in pseudo-references and spurious science, and as such does a disservice to the development of a truly scientific discourse by muddling up the issues.

(b) *Theory*. But the *Cinéthique* team are dimly aware of this difficulty, and their way of meeting it is to force the cinema into the domain of science. But as such a metamorphosis is impossible in thought or in practice, their attempts to justify it theoretically are grotesque. Having read in Althusser that science and theory are the opposite of ideology, they conclude that the cinema must be converted into a 'theoretical practice' the first object of which must be itself: '*The only way in which it (the cinema) can transgress and break out is via theoretical practice.*' We ourselves readily accept the possibility of a cinema in which theoretical reflection would be joined to practice. Indeed, examples of such a cinema already exist, notably Eisenstein. The effect on practice would be that every step in the life of a film from manufacture to distribution would be informed by thought, and the product would not come into the world in such a blind, naïve, ideologically determined way. But the result of such methods would be a heightened and more effective struggle against the general ideological determinants governing the cinema (see our last article), and against the ideology itself which would be weakened and distorted by being dislodged from one of its terrains (the cinema) not, in any circumstances, the transformation of the cinema into a scientific system (at least if the word science is to keep any meaning, cf Badiou).

So *Cinéthique* has nothing serious to say about the cinema and science. The discussion does not linger long on 'theoretical practice' itself but goes on quickly to the role that theoretical cinema could play:

There are two roles which the cinema could play in the theoretical process:

(a) It can REPRODUCE KNOWLEDGE produced by one or other of the sciences (historical materialism, medicine, physics, geography, etc). It acts as a vector in the process of communicating knowledge.

(b) It PRODUCES SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE about itself. It can show the material facts of its physical and social existence. It can draw away the veil which normally covers a film's ideological, political and economic function, and by doing so denounce the ideology inherent in the cinema's 'impression of reality'. Through this action it becomes theoretical.

So it appears that *Cinéthique's* cinema-science would be firstly a means of communicating scientific knowledge. Of course this is a role which the cinema can (and does) play, and which is integrated in the domain of

science (or rather the popularisation or exemplification of science). But this does not make the cinema any the less an ideological product. Far from transforming a film from ideology into science, the proceeding actually transforms science into ideology by producing it on film. But this role is backed up by another. Cinema would become science in revealing the facts of its process of production, the whole plethora of conditions affecting its existence. The film would unveil everything that has been integrated into it. But it is difficult to understand in which sense this would make the film scientific; all that can be said about such a proceeding would be that films would now say something about themselves, instead of just blindly existing. But this discourse would continue to be cinematic. When a film says everything about the economy, the production, the ideology, the manufacture of films, it has no effect on the reality of these factors in the film producing situation, on the contrary. Once again, the cinema, as an ideological product, can show up its own ideological nature and function, can guide them in a certain direction, can try to change to a different ideology or change the one it is in, but this does not make it a theoretical system or a scientific discourse. Just because a film transmits a certain body of 'knowledge' about itself and the cinema, this does not mean that the medium which transmitted it is scientific, or that the 'knowledge' itself is science. A camera filming itself (*Octobre à Madrid*) contributes nothing in the way of science or theory or even 'materialist cinema'; the most that one can say of it is that it is a reflection of a reflection, the ideology mirrored in itself.³

And *Cinéthique* concludes:

From the foregoing it should be clear that function (b) is of prime importance. It conditions the exercise of function (a). A film has to work on the theoretical level before it can communicate knowledge. We can therefore formulate the following decisive rule: IN THE CINEMA THE COMMUNICATION OF KNOWLEDGE IS ATTENDANT UPON THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CINEMA. If the two functions do not coincide the film relapses into ideology. Truths presented in it convince, not because they are known theoretically, but because they are made credible by the film.

This conclusion sums up the confusions of the whole: (1) because a film 'works on the theoretical level' it does not necessarily mean it retains any explicit traces of the theoretical process; (2) to accumulate 'knowledge' does not inevitably imply leaving the ideology, for the process of accumulation takes place *within* the ideology as well; (3) 'truths' never came to be 'known theoretically' through a film: known, yes; theoretically, no. *Cinéthique* misuses language in many ways. An over-hasty marriage between 'theory' and 'cinema' goes side by side with an equally unwise divorce between 'cinema' and 'ideology'.

The usage which *Cinéthique* makes of words like 'science' and 'theory' is basically magical, as though their very presence in the text was enough to guarantee the 'break', the 'transformation' the change to a socialist society, and the banishment of idealism by materialism.

(c) *The examples.* These are the films which *Cinéthique* consider effect the 'break' and reach the level of 'theory'. Two are quoted particularly freely: *Octobre à Madrid*, *Le Joueur de quilles*: the former because it describes its own process of production, the latter because it is 'mute' ⁴ except for the 'word of God'. That the former is interesting, and the latter of no interest whatever, is not relevant to the point in question, which is *Cinéthique's* claim that they both deserve to be qualified as 'materialist cinema', pointing *the way ahead into a cinema which will really be of use to the proletariat in its struggle for power.*

Let us look into this claim. *Octobre à Madrid* does indeed tell the story of a film, one which failed to get made in Madrid. Hanoun shows himself, films himself, says what is going to go on in his film, pretends to want to shoot some sequences of it, shows himself not shooting them. The substance of the film consists of this kind of flashing to and fro between the plans for the film and the director's continuous talk about them which prevents him from realising them. It is easy to see the naïve mistake that *Cinéthique* are making here; they are muddling up the actual work that goes into a film and is visible in it, with a fictional presentation of such work, like the one that can be seen in *Octobre à Madrid*. *Octobre à Madrid* is (like *Two Weeks in Another Town*, *La Fête à Henriette* or *Le Débutant*), a film telling the story of the making of a film. It has suspense (Hanoun asking with a sidelong smile whether he is ever going to finish making it) and other fictional devices, the cinema being just one of the elements in the story. In fact it is simply a device for making fiction more credible, the very thing which *Cinéthique* denounces most violently as the ideology's strongest card in alienating the audience. This is not scientific criticism, the first requirement for that would be to study the films themselves with much more care than *Cinéthique* has done.

Le Joueur de quilles is supposed to be 'materialist' on the grounds that all speech today is ideological, that only the voice of the bourgeoisie is heard in the cinema, and that a silent film — such as Lajournade's — is a way of escaping this form of ideological domination. As if the dialogue was the only way that the ideology had of making itself heard! And as if one only had to refuse to speak in order to be revolutionary! (Not to mention the fact that in these circumstances the bourgeoisie can do all the talking — which seems a curious way of conducting the ideological struggle.)

The mutism of the film is without any doubt the sign of where its allegiances lie; it is the ineradicable trace left by work, maturing obstinately in silence,

which will finally break out into an entirely new mode of speech. Mutism is not loss of speech but active refusal to speak in *places* occupied by the enemy.

On the basis of the mutism a very long argument is developed in which the author aims to prove that because the film cannot be interpreted either symbolically (it says nothing, even by means of symbols) or realistically (it shows only images), it accomplishes the staggering achievement of *changing the whole frame of reference of the cinema. The new frame of reference becomes not the director but the means of production of the film*, shown on the screen. This result is achieved through planning the film as a self-contained whole, without any reference to anything except what is in the film. Thus the characters are not really characters, insofar as they only react to the 'spatial modifications' of the image, and not in terms of psychology, and the film-maker appears as a failed film-maker, thus integrating the idea of the *disappearance* of the author into the filmic whole, but his work is still 'metaphorically' included in the form of shooting-directions and sound-frequencies from the mixing process which are heard on the sound track. All this is supposed to detach the film from 'formalism' (which is curiously defined as the reflection of a World or an Ego). *Of course all the film expresses is the film, but it expresses all the film.* (It will be noticed that *Cinéthique* have adopted the most typically idealist tautology for their analysis.) By declaring formalism inadmissible *Le Joueur de quilles* passes quite naturally *on to the side and into the field of materialist cinema* (a piece of ideological sleight-of-hand if ever there was one). And one day, the article concludes, *one day we shall speak without metaphors.*

And in fact the only proper way of describing *Le Joueur de Quilles* is as one long monstrous metaphor of uselessness and impotence — its own. Things have come to an extraordinary pass if all such manifestations of the total bankruptcy of petit-bourgeois idealism are to be included in the field of materialist cinema. To say *metaphorically* that the bourgeoisie as a class have been condemned by history is both to condemn oneself with it, and say nothing (metaphorically or otherwise) about what condemns it. And to take this film for the one which breaks with formalism and idealism is to take platitude and tautology (a film is a film) for a subversion. Of course in examining films we have to take note of its material nature, the materials that went into it, but that does not mean that the materials of the cinema are the same as materialist cinema.

(d) *Theory of the cinema.* Finally, we have to weigh up the truth of the affirmation that *Cinéthique* are constantly making about themselves, namely that they are in the process of working out a theory of the cinema, which will be scientific as well as materialist. It is ridiculous to insist that the film *ceases to have an ideological existence* and require

that it gains instead a 'theoretical' or 'scientific' existence (ie ridiculous from the theoretical or the scientific point of view though it may make anyone who is sufficiently muddle-headed or idealist to think it feel good) but it is not ridiculous to be working on a theory of cinema, or attempting to practise scientific criticism. But it will be obvious from the preceding that theoretical rigour and scientific precision cannot exist where there is conceptual vagueness. Vagueness proceeds from ideology and cannot produce anything but an ideological discourse and ideological criticism, even when it is loudest in condemning it. You need more rigour than is exhibited by *Cinéthique* to do away with the idealism in cinema criticism. And materialist criticism has to be as rigorous as Marx, Lenin or Althusser. It is not enough to just borrow some of their ideas, not even their ideas, simply their terminology, and impose them willy-nilly on a discourse about cinema.

For instance, when they quote Marx as follows:

He said that ideology showed us men and their relations upside down, 'as in a *camera obscura*'⁵ [translator's note: This was spelt 'caméra obscure' by *Cinéthique* — wrongly, as *Cahiers* go on to point out. In this context there should not be an accent on the e. That is reserved for the movie camera (la caméra)].

And comment on it as follows:

Marx compared the action of the ideology to the action of the movie camera . . . it seems as though the makers of socialist, social and militant films have adopted this as an all-purpose rule of thumb for making socialist pictures.

do they seriously believe Marx had prophetic dreams about movie cameras? Or are they misspelling and misinterpreting the word in order to be witty on purpose — a little joke which would have enchanted Freud.

Cinéthique are as impatient about the revolution as they are about theory — no doubt because they feel both of them easy to achieve, and that if you want them enough they will happen. Need we point out that such wishful thinking looks very like the idealism that the *Cinéthique* team believe they are fighting.

Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni

FOOTNOTES

1. We are not saying that *Cinéthique* ought not to use these ideas. On the contrary: they are essential to contemporary debate. But they have to be constantly defined and redefined in their new context, and not just imported piecemeal into the cinema from disciplines in which they have a specific use and meaning. Without redefinition such imported terms cannot have a specific meaning for the cinema. This implies a lot of hard thinking, as we

know at *Cahiers*, for we would be the first to admit that much of our work in this direction is still very tentative. But at least we do not pretend to have solved the problem of definition with one wave of a magic (ideological) wand, and to be able henceforth to practise 'scientific criticism'.

[Translator's note: The discussion which follows centres round the word *forclose*, which I have translated 'inadmissible'. The noun form *forclusion* I have translated as 'exclusion'.]

For example, the word 'inadmissible' is used to describe formalism. In the note, we read:

Legal term designating the situation of a person barred from exercising a right because he did not exercise it within the prescribed time. It therefore means 'excluded'.

The first sentence does indeed associate the word with its legal usage, but the second sentence moves it, almost unnoticeably on to a different plane, that of *la logique du signifiant* in which Lacan gave it a very precise meaning corresponding to the Freudian term *Verwerfung*. The author of the text and the note is certainly aware of this meaning as his work is impregnated with the terminology of that school of thought, and he ought to know better than to indulge in such logical imprecisions, which can do far reaching harm to the development of theory.

For example, when discussing the idea of the *parenthesis*, the author states that the bourgeois ideology of meaning sets up a hierarchy within the written sentence, in accordance with which words set in parentheses are of less importance than those in the body of the sentence, and that only a true materialist practice can break the hierarchy and give the parenthesis an equal function with the rest of the text. In his delight at this discovery the author quotes Sollers' use of parenthesis, unconsciously proving that he knows nothing of Roussel, or of the work of Julia Kristeva (in 'La Productivité dite Text', *Communications* 11/68) and Michel Foucault.

A little further on, the same author, in attempting to elucidate the relation between cinema and politics takes exactly three pages to come to this conclusion: the cinema does not belong to political practice, but to ideological practice. Now, ever since Engels it has been accepted that the complex whole of social practice is structured into three major fields of influence: economic, political, ideological. And it is not an original consideration to make that since the ideological field comprises religion, morality, art, etc this is the only field to which the cinema can belong (although certain of its characteristics would seem to place it at the juncture of economics and politics). Nor is it making a discovery to observe that ideological practices (and consequently the cinema) have the function in a bourgeois capitalist society, of *reformulating the social demand*, that they *could not be closer* to political practice, and yet can never be included in it, or considered to be fully a part of it (Thomas Herbert, *Cahiers pour l'analyse* 1/2). If the author were making an original scholarly analysis, it would be perfectly admissible to devote three pages or more to it, but in the circumstances, three seems excessive. But even more astonishing is the way in which he falsifies it all to look as though, as a result of an intense and laborious expenditure of mental effort in marshalling concepts he had come to these conclusions all by himself.

It is clear that *Cinématique* are seriously confused about the concept of *theoretical practice* (the mode of production of scientific knowledge), confounding it totally with the simple 'theory' of a practice (technical, empiri-

cal or ideological). 'Theory' in this application simply means the special set of concepts needed by these practices in order to accomplish the tasks assigned to them. These sets of concepts are never more than a reflection of what is to be accomplished in the means used to attain it, and has nothing to do with theoretical practice. To say for instance that Marcel Hanoun in *Octobre à Madrid* is exercising a theoretical practice of the cinema is a complete aberration. What Hanoun has done is to substitute a cinema which mirrors, mimes, looks at and reflects on itself for the more normal empirical, unreflective, 'inspired' variety, but this does not mean that he has exercised any kind of theoretical (scientific) practice; the most he may have done is to produce a 'theory' about his kind of cinema. On the other hand it is extremely possible to apply a theoretical practice to films which have none. This is the essential role of criticism. Don't let us mix our categories.

4. Like Garrel's *Le Révélateur*, though in *Cinéthique's* eyes he is a wretched idealist (like Bene). Garrel has been the subject of particularly noisy and idiotic criticism from *Cinéthique*, and we intend to put a stop to it as soon as we can by pointing out how despite his fighting talk, Lajournade's films are the height of petit bourgeois complacency. In contrast we shall indicate how in spite of his messianic attitudes (reflected in the exasperatingly tedious nature of his chosen form) Garrel's films are infinitely less idealist than Lajournade's.
5. In the German edition, Marx writes *Camera obscura*. The same words are to be found in the classic French translation with a note: *Chambre Noire* (dark room). Whereas in the small volume of *The German Ideology* there is the same note, but in the text it is written *camera obscure* (this is the page quoted by *Cinéthique*). In fact what they have done is pick gaily on a printer's error, add an accent, and there we have Marx's expression applied to the cinema (entirely out of context with the passage from which it was taken). Neither very rigorous, nor humorous.

Reprinted from Cahiers du Cinéma No 217, November 1969, with the permission of the Editors.

Translations by Susan Bennett

New Film Scripts From Lorrimer



Luis Bunuel's Tristana

The original script of Bunuel's latest and most intriguing film which will open in London shortly. Full colour cover and over 50 still photographs along with a full introduction about the making of the film by J. Francisco Aranda. £1.05

René Clair's A Nous la Liberté/Entr'acte

Two of Clair's earlier films; a hilarious satire on the world of automation, and a surrealist interval entertainment for a ballet. 90p

Akira Kurosawa's Seven Samurai

Kurosawa's powerful story of the band of Samurai who protect an ignorant peasant community from brigands. £1.26

Orson Welles' The Trial

Orson Welles' version of Kafka's novel is one of the most interesting and experimental films he has made. £1.05

Claude Lelouch's A Man and A Woman

Unashamedly romantic, this modern classic was one of the first to make successful use of colour filters as a creative device. 75p

Luis Bunuel's Belle de Jour

Reality and fantasy are subtly mixed in Bunuel's disturbing story of an upper-middle class Frenchwoman turned prostitute. £1.05

Erich von Stroheim's Greed

The complete nine-hour shooting script of von Stroheim's most ambitious venture, which now only exists in a mutilated form. £2.10

For more information write to :

Lorrimer Publishing Ltd, 47 Dean Street, London, W1

Educational Notes

SEFT one-day school

The first of a new series of one-day schools promoted by SEFT took place at the Derby College of Art on Saturday, March 20. The school was organised by the complementary studies department of the College of Art, SEFT helped in finding the lecturers and shaping the programme. About twenty teachers and lecturers from a variety of educational institutions in the Derby area took part.

The morning was given over to an account of film teaching in the context of thematic, social studies based approaches and to a showing of *Fort Apache*. The afternoon was principally devoted to an extended discussion of the film in the context of its possible uses in the classroom. The school concluded with an attempt to assess the needs of film teachers and an account of the help SEFT and the BFI's Education Department could offer.

The planning of the school started from the fact that the dominant approach to film teaching is at present socially orientated and theme based. The school put *its* emphasis on a consideration of the cinema as an art form and more particularly as a *popular* art form. From this point of view *Fort Apache* proved a good choice and provoked a wide-ranging discussion in which most of the important positions about the teaching of film as an art were articulated.

The first position was essentially a Leavisite one: the idea that film could be used to teach critical discrimination, with the teacher helping his class to decide where the film was successful and where it fell into cliché or stereotype. Against this position it was argued that teaching discrimination too easily became a way of imposing a teacher's taste on his students.

To guard against this the teacher's first task should be to encourage an *understanding* of the film with decisions about its quality coming later, if at all. This view with its emphasis on intellectual analysis was partially challenged by a third view that the film teacher should be mainly concerned with encouraging and protecting personal response on the part of the students.

If any conclusions could be drawn from the discussion they were the rather daunting ones that the attempt to teach film as an art provokes fundamental questions both about the nature of education and the methods of film criticism. And the people who are called on to solve these fundamental questions are teachers oppressed by the demands of the teaching situation, harassed by timetable requirements, the absence of basic facilities like proper projection facilities or money to hire films, and lack of sympathy from headmasters, education authorities, etc.

Clearly in such a situation teachers need as much help as they can get from outside. The way the Derby school was organised with the College of Art acting as the focus for the film work going on in the area should provide a useful method for giving such help.

A follow-up to the one-day school has been organised for an eight-week period directed to teachers and their students. Four films of Hitchcock's will be screened — *Marnie*, *The Birds*, *Psycho* and *North by Northwest*, to be followed by discussions as to the use of such films in the context of schools. The eight-week course will be followed by another one-day school to assess progress, articulate further issues and to plan a further follow-up course.

Teachers interested should contact Ian Christie, Derby and District College of Art, Kedleston Road, Derby DE3 1GB.

J.H.
A.L.

monogram

the film magazine which has a critical position and a coherent perspective on the modern cinema

incorporates the Brighton Film Review and regularly features auteur studies

reviews of current releases

reassessment of the classics

articles on film-aesthetics

book-reviews

first issue now on sale

The American cinema: Why Hollywood

Sherlock Holmes

Rio Lobo

The Kremlin Letter

also + Eisenstein's Style + Trauffaut's *Enfant Sauvage* +

Losey's *Figures in a Landscape* + book-reviews of Chabrol

Walsh + Fuller

second issue out in June

The European Cinema

Bunuel + Bertolucci + Rohmer + Rivette

Olmi + Visconti + Pontecorvo

pay 20p instead of 25p for your copy by taking out a subscription now:

five issues for £1.00, postage included

monogram

3 Fawcett Street, London SW10 01-352 4266

KINEMA

Spring issue includes —

Aspects of the Western:

Violence in the Western

John Wayne

ABC of the Western

Cartoons: the Mischief Makers

Renoir in '30s

Subscription £1.50 for 4 issues

a few back issues available, featuring: Robbe-Grillet

Siegel

Fuller

Subscriptions and Correspondence to

KINEMA, c/o Bux, 7 Lincoln Street, Nottingham

Films for General Studies

Films for General Studies,* published recently by the Association for Liberal Education, brings together a selection of films of all kinds — documentaries, shorts, cartoons, feature films, etc. The linking factor is that each title has at some time been *used* (at one of the fifty colleges of technology, art and further education listed), in the context of a general studies course. In each case the teacher has provided a brief assessment of his experience with the film.

Nothing like this guide has appeared before, and it responds to a real need among General Studies teachers. It offers a clear index and detailed information on distributors and hire charges for all the 300 listed films, as well as some indication of content and quality. John Thole, the editor, is hopeful that reactions will provide enough material for an eventual supplement.

It is difficult (and perhaps unfair to try) to isolate anything like a coherent view of the purpose of film in education from the sketchy comments provided. Insofar as they are articulated at all, the criteria by which films are evaluated seem to be a diffuse reflection of the ideas which brought Liberal Studies into being: on the one hand there is the concern to offer a more broadly based educational experience to students specialising in a particular discipline, and on the other a desire to provide an alternative to that sector of students considered to be by nature or by previous training ill-equipped to benefit from any more academically demanding course of learning.

What is not clear is what film can provide that is specific to the film medium. The reasons that emerge for using film are, it appears, that students like it, or, more usefully, that they are affected by it sufficiently

* Compiled by the Association for Liberal Education, ed John Thole (60p).

strongly to engage afterwards in a discussion. Thus films are judged firstly by whether they are popular (and hence the recurrent complaint that a film is 'old-fashioned' — that there may be reasons for a certain style is rarely allowed) and secondly by whether they start a discussion. Occasionally a film that satisfies neither of these criteria may be used for the somewhat paternalist reason that it would do the students good. Several films on Nazi concentration camps come into this category.

There is no doubt that however unsatisfactory it may be, this is how film is most often used in General Studies, and given the conditions in which the teaching is done, such uses of film will probably continue to be the most prevalent. Yet many of the comments recorded in this guide have disturbing implications for those who can see another use for film. It is easy enough to discount ignorance (as in the attribution of *Rio Bravo* to Billy Wilder) or mere philistinism (as with one reviewer who writes of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* 'too overdrawn for Engineering and young students . . . too many flashbacks . . . windy! verbose! . . . in the great American novel category'). What is far more damaging is the almost total lack of understanding of the nature of film. Time and again specific features of film language, intermingling of fantasy and reality, the use of flashbacks, the rhythm of editing, etc, are seen merely as obstacles which prevent effective use of the film in General Studies. Thus the puzzled reaction to Franju's *Le Sang des Bêtes*: 'Why Franju made this film is not exactly clear.' The reviewer gropes around for a possible use for the film which he admits is, in some indefinable way, 'remarkable', and ends despairingly with a feeble pun about strong meat.

The great majority of the lecturers quoted reveal in their comments an extreme literal-mindedness in their approach to film. Film is in fact used almost exclusively to illustrate a point the lecturer has already made or to provide straightforward information, and so many of the comments register disappointment that a particular film does not serve the purpose it is required for. Thus many films are put to a use for which they were never designed. This is bad enough when, say, lecturers are reduced to filling out a course on trade unions with a twenty-year-old documentary produced by the COI for spoon-feeding to the natives in Africa. But it is disastrous when *Citizen Kane* is used as evidence in politics courses (with a few nervous comments on its technique), and *My Darling Clementine* is suggested as 'a reasonably faithful (one supposes) picture of an early township in the American West'. One description, of *The Blue Angel*, is a classic of its kind: 'more effective if shown to a mixed audience. Raises many points, eg marrying beneath one's social position; the cruelty of the professor's students; comparison with "romance" as depicted in pulp magazines, films and television, and, of course, through "pop" songs.' It is difficult to imagine the insensitivity which could produce such crassness.

The compiler of this guide admits to being not concerned with film as art, such a consideration being relegated to a separate world of film appreciation generally thought to be taking care of itself elsewhere. This disclaimer is disingenuous, however, since it is clear that there is no understanding whatsoever of what it would entail to treat film as something other than fodder for discussion of a variety of social problems. It is precisely this that must disturb the reader of *Screen*, that after all these years understanding of film is at such a low level, even among that section of teachers who, it is fondly thought, are most alive to the possibilities of film in education. Compared to this, the poverty, both in quality and quantity, of suitable General Studies films revealed in this compilation is a problem that can be faced with confidence, for it could, after all, be solved with an imaginative programme financed by the educational authorities. *Films for General Studies* may help, in a small way, to bring this about. But if the attitudes it reveals to the film as a worthwhile subject of study in its own right are representative, then film education has hardly advanced in thirty years. This publication may delay the advance even longer.

E.B.
D.M.

New Extracts

Gambling House, Ted Tetzlaff (1951)
Macao, Josef von Sternberg (1951)
On Dangerous Ground, Nicholas Ray (1950)
Pierrot le fou, Jean-Luc Godard (1965)
Run of the Arrow, Samuel Fuller (1956)

IN PREPARATION

Beyond a Reasonable Doubt, Fritz Lang (1956)
Farewell my Lovely, Edward Dmytryk (1944)
Stromboli, Roberto Rossellini (1949)

The compiler of this guide admits to being not concerned with film as art, such a consideration being relegated to a separate world of film appreciation generally thought to be taking care of itself elsewhere. This disclaimer is disingenuous, however, since it is clear that there is no understanding whatsoever of what it would entail to treat film as something other than fodder for discussion of a variety of social problems. It is precisely this that must disturb the reader of *Screen*, that after all these years understanding of film is at such a low level, even among that section of teachers who, it is fondly thought, are most alive to the possibilities of film in education. Compared to this, the poverty, both in quality and quantity, of suitable General Studies films revealed in this compilation is a problem that can be faced with confidence, for it could, after all, be solved with an imaginative programme financed by the educational authorities. *Films for General Studies* may help, in a small way, to bring this about. But if the attitudes it reveals to the film as a worthwhile subject of study in its own right are representative, then film education has hardly advanced in thirty years. This publication may delay the advance even longer.

E.B.
D.M.

New Extracts

Gambling House, Ted Tetzlaff (1951)
Macao, Josef von Sternberg (1951)
On Dangerous Ground, Nicholas Ray (1950)
Pierrot le fou, Jean-Luc Godard (1965)
Run of the Arrow, Samuel Fuller (1956)

IN PREPARATION

Beyond a Reasonable Doubt, Fritz Lang (1956)
Farewell my Lovely, Edward Dmytryk (1944)
Stromboli, Roberto Rossellini (1949)

16mm Distributors

CONTEMPORARY FILMS LTD

Anyone who has been involved in running a college or university film society will need little introduction to the 16 mm collection of Contemporary Films and its selection of classics from the major world cinemas. Their highly international lists do however have areas like the range of films from the Third World, which are possibly less well known.

Like ETV, whose 16 mm library was reviewed in our last issue, Contemporary's main market is in the educational field. For the director, Charles Cooper, this is as it should be — a deliberate policy flowing from a particular view of the cultural/social role of film.

Again like ETV, Contemporary has been in existence for twenty years. The library, built up over a period, reflects the directors' allegiance to 'committed' cinema. Apart from landmarks in early Soviet cinema, and major productions of the Polish and Czech film industries, it includes notable examples of the work of independent film-makers, past and present: Biberman's *Salt of the Earth* was recently given a run at the Paris Pullman, while *Heart of Spain* and *Native Land* which Biberman made with Paul Strand during their work with Frontier Films in the thirties and early forties, are also on Contemporary's lists; more recently they have acquired Bert Koetter's *Andy Warhol and His Clan*, and Jack Hassan's Paris interviews with James Baldwin.

The selection of films from the Third World include both documentary and feature films, among them the controversial film on Apartheid in South Africa *End of Dialogue*, Cuba's *Hanoi, Tuesday 13* (Santiago Alvarez) and Egyptian director Shadi Abdul Salam's *Night of Counting the Years*. Contemporary have recently acquired Ansano Gianarelli's film on the Debray trial which draws a parallel between the Latin American situation and Southern Italy as in its way also part of the Third World. Also due for release soon is a colour film on the operations of the Mozambique guerrillas filmed secretly by a group of English film-makers.

Charles Cooper's experience with film began with his association with Kino-Films in the thirties when he worked together with other young film-makers on documentaries on the hunger marches in Wales, and tenant strikes in East London. He went to America in the forties and spent seven years running the film department of a major Labour organisation before setting up Contemporary Films in America in 1947 — a period of American history which was hardly favourable to the kind of venture he envisaged. As a non-citizen he very soon came up against the immigration authorities over the distribution of a number of Soviet films — *Alexander Nevsky* was one of them — and eventually sold the company to return to England.

Charles Cooper does not, however, feel that his left-wing political commitments have been the primary criteria for his work in film selection. His first considerations centre on a view of the art of film and are therefore predominantly aesthetic. After that, he explains: 'there are some forty national cinema industries of merit operating today, if we can provide the best products of these industries we are in some way contributing to the better understanding of other cultures and traditions in this country'.

Given this policy, the Paris Pullman obviously plays an important part in the company's operations as a showcase for its newest acquisitions. Charles Cooper and his wife feel that one cinema is not enough. Ideally they would like to see a multiplication of cinemas like the Pullman, on the Paris model, functioning as local cinemas outside the centre for first runs, balanced by one or two more central repertory cinemas. At the moment a pile-up of films is inevitable, and only half the audiences for the Pullman are local, while the rest are drawn from all parts of London.

One way in which they envisage the cinema playing a role in community life is through education. They hope soon to set up special afternoon performances for fifth and sixth formers from schools in the area. Children have a natural resistance to the 'foreign' film and need to be encouraged to overcome the problems of sub-titling, they feel. They are optimistic of the future of 16 mm and see it continuing side by side with the newest developments in cassettes and Super-8, catering for the slightly larger group audience in film societies and schools.

Books Received

The following titles have been received and will be reviewed in future issues of *Screen*.

The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: The War of Words, Vol III, Asa Briggs, Oxford University Press

Allan Dwan, Peter Bogdanovich, Studio Vista

Discovery of the Cinema, Thorold Dickinson, Faber and Faber

A Mirror for England, Raymond Durnat, Faber and Faber

The Commissariat of Enlightenment, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Cambridge University Press

Negative Space, Manny Farber, Studio Vista

The New Priesthood, British Television Today, Eds Joan Bakewell and Nicholas Garnham, Penguin Books

Violence on the Screen, André Glucksman, BFI Education Department

Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution, El Lissitzky, Lund Humphries Percy

Expanded Cinema, Gene Youngblood, Studio Vista

BETTER BOOKS

A GREAT BOOKSHOP FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

CHARLES LAUGHTON £2.50

William Brown
(*A Pictorial Treasury of his Films.*)

A MIRROR FOR ENGLAND

Raymond Durnat £3.00

(*A spotlight on 20 years of British Films from the mid-40s to the late 60s, with 16 pages of plates.*)

EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA £2.75

David Curtis

ANDY WARHOL 80p

Peter Gidal
(*160 pages, over 100 illustrations.*)

HISTORY OF THE BRITISH

FILM 1918-1929 £7.35

Rachael Low

SCIENCE FICTION FILM 80p

Dennis Gifford
(*160 pages, over 100 illustrations.*)

NEGATIVE SPACE £2.75

Manny Farber on the Movies
(*A distillation of the best writings on the cinema by this entertaining, opinionated, informative and often acid critic.*)

To: Better Books Ltd (Cinema and Theatre Dept)
94 Charing Cross Road, London WC2, England. Tel: 836 6944

Please supply title/titles marked X. Please charge my account/Barclay Card or find remittance.

Please add 15p postage charged to one book, 5p each book thereafter.

Name Address

From Work in Progress

The Editorial Board of *Screen* is engaged in a work project on educational theory and policy in Britain.

Part of the work of the Board entailed the reading of the education *Black Papers*. One article in particular gave considerable pleasure. The article appears in *Black Paper Two*. It is called 'Comprehensives and Equality' and was written by Richard Lynn, Research Professor of Psychology, Dublin. Some extracts from that article have been chosen in order to pass on to readers of *Screen* some of the pleasure experienced by members of the Board.

'Consider the civilisation of the United States: the quality of Peyton Place and Dr Kildare; the ubiquitous cacophony of canned music in supermarkets and restaurants; the horrors of Broadway and Hollywood; the lack of respect for authority and learning; the contemptuous dismissal of intellectuals as 'eggheads'. Is it not probable that these are partly the result of a comprehensive education system which has deliberately sacrificed quality and standards in an attempt to bring about social cohesion — an attempt which the present state of civil disorder in the United States shows to have been an abysmal failure? Those who think that comprehensives will foster love and tolerance between different social classes and groups can hardly be encouraged by present conditions in the United States.'

'For several hundred years intelligent people have risen from the working class into the middle class and, conversely, unintelligent people have dropped from the middle class into the working class.'

The effect of this flexible social system is that the more intelligent genetic strains must have tended to become concentrated in the middle class. . . .

. . . By blinding themselves and others to the truth, the progressives raise false hopes that much more can be done for slum children than is actually possible. No amount of money poured into the 'educational priority areas', enthusiastically espoused in the Plowden Report, is likely to bring any appreciable proportion of slum children up to the standards of university entrance. The same is true of comprehensives and fashionable new methods of teaching. False premises lead to false

remedies and ultimately to disappointment. If it is thought desirable to improve the intelligence of the population, money would be much better spent on helping less intelligent people to limit the size of their families. Since many have more children than they wish, this would be a boon both to the families themselves and to the rest of the population. In these egalitarian days such facts may seem harsh, but it is always best to start from the truth.'

'The preservation of quality in a democratic age may well be impossible and we should perhaps resign ourselves to the imminence of a new dark age in which the envy, malice and philistinism of the masses, and of intellectuals who identify with them, lead to the destruction of a culture that can never be enjoyed by the majority. Once before, in the concluding years of the Roman Empire, Europe has seen the tyranny of the majority leading to the breakdown of civilisation and the survival of the cultural tradition in isolated outposts.'

THE SILENT PICTURE

The only serious quarterly devoted to the art
and history of the silent cinema

Personalities and films covered so far include Betty Balfour, George Pearson, John Bunny, Kalem serials, American Biograph and Griffith, Miriam Cooper, Mae Marsh, Robert Harron, Ramon Novarro, Ivan Mosjoukine, Thomas Ince, Judith of Bethulia, Hal Roach, Pimple, G. B. Samuelson, Marion Davies, Dagmar Godowsky, Remodelling Her Husband, Dovzhenko, Lillian Gish, Sarah Bernhardt, The Adventures of Prince Achmed, Emil Jannings, Pabst, Arthur von Gerlach, Leni Riefenstahl, Raoul Walsh, The Living Corpse, Kuleshov. . . .

Contributors have included Sir Michael Balcon, Lillian Gish, Blanche Sweet, DeWitt Bodeen, Liam O'Leary, Denis Gifford, Thorold Dickinson, Harold Dunham, Evelyn Laye, Lotte Reiniger, Lotte Eisner, John Stuart. . . .

A year's subscription is only 60p and some back issues are still available at 15p each from

THE SILENT PICTURE
613 Harrow Road, London W10